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Executive Summary

The Special Education Implementation Review was initiated in May 2000 by the Minister of Education to report on the current status of the implementation of the *Special Education Policy* released in 1996. A committee, which included representatives of parents, teachers, organizations representing children and youth with disabilities, school boards, universities, and government departments involved in providing services to children and youth with special needs, was established. In carrying out its mandate, the Special Education Implementation Review Committee reported on the current status of special education policy implementation, identified challenges to the provision of special education programs and services in Nova Scotia public schools, and developed recommendations to address these challenges.

The committee received background information on legislation, various special education policy documents, and relevant reports from other provinces. Presentations on specific topics such as special education funding, interagency collaboration, accountability considerations, and intensive behaviour intervention programming and strategies were incorporated into the meeting schedule between August 2000 and May 2001.

Public input was obtained through a survey questionnaire, which was made available to the general public and to other stakeholders. Respondents were asked to consider eight special education policy–related areas and to indicate what they believed to be significant improvements and difficulties in supporting children and youth with special needs since the policy was implemented in 1996 and to make suggestions for improvement. A focus group process was utilized to explore issues in more depth with parents, students, teachers, teacher assistants, school and student services administrators, school board members, and other professionals who serve students with special needs. Focus group sessions were also conducted for the Acadian and Francophone communities and for African Nova Scotian representatives. Survey questionnaires were sent directly to representatives of the Mi'kmaw population. A report of the findings from the survey and the focus group sessions was prepared by Dr. Victor Thiessen and Barbara Cottrell.

The committee acknowledges that schools and boards are currently attempting to provide a wide range of programming and services for students with special needs, within financial and other resource limitations. There is recognition by the committee that additional improvements are needed to address ongoing and new challenges to meeting the diverse learning needs of students.

The review findings indicate that progress has been made in implementing many of the special education policy areas. Inclusive schooling, the program planning process, resources and supports, and the identification and assessment of students with special needs were most often cited as significantly improved. However, the need for more resources and supports to fully implement the policy was highlighted by both survey respondents and focus groups. Inadequate funding is perceived to be at the heart of limiting progress in the implementation of the special education policy. Indeed, this lack of resources is jeopardizing the implementation of the policy, which has an impact on all students, not just those with special needs. In terms of the program planning process, further efforts need to be made to ensure that meaningful parental involvement occurs.
Suggestions were made for establishing clearer criteria and definitions both for access to core special education services and for the distinct roles of the relevant stakeholders. The need for enhanced communication among the public education system and its partners and for a well-defined system of accountability were also identified as key issues to be addressed. In all, the committee made the following 34 recommendations:

Inclusive Schooling

1. The Department of Education and school boards should develop a communication plan to improve understanding of inclusive schooling and programming and services for students with special needs. The communication plan will describe how to access existing documents and will support the development of a series of information brochures. The brochures should describe programming and services available and how they can be accessed. Brochures should cover, but not be limited to, the following:
   - inclusive schooling
   - identification and assessment
   - program planning process
   - appeal process
   - transitions

   Stakeholder groups should be consulted regarding the development of the plan and materials, and the documents should emphasize clear explanations using plain language.

2. The Department of Education and school boards should establish common terminology in special education (e.g., adaptations/modifications, EPA/SPA/TA, resource teachers/PST/LST, etc.). Further, the Department of Education should clarify the term "emotional impairment" in Policy 1.3.

Professional Development

3. The Department of Education, university faculties of education, school boards, and the Nova Scotia Teachers Union (NSTU) should collaborate on the development and implementation of an ongoing inservice plan for teachers, administrators, professional support staff, and teacher assistants on programming and services for students with special needs. The plan should encourage
   - involvement of teachers and teacher assistants in the design and development of inservice plans to address local needs
   - participation of school board members, parents, university education faculty, and professionals from outside education who work with children and youth with special needs.

   The plan should increase knowledge and understanding of specific disabilities and the link between assessment and instructional practices and should focus on a variety of teaching strategies, adaptations, learning styles, individual program planning, meaningful parental involvement, teacher-student communication, behavioural issues, and leadership.

   The Department of Education and school boards should provide sufficient additional funding and time for implementation of the plan and ensure systematic evaluation of outcomes.

4. The Department of Education and school boards should develop and implement information and training sessions for parents regarding the special education policy, programming and services for students with special needs, and issues surrounding specific disabilities.

5. The Department of Education, school boards, NSTU, and faculties of education should design and implement an annual institute to provide opportunities for education professionals to share and network effective/promising practices, materials, and resources. Involved in these sessions should be parents, advocacy groups, and other professionals to share their experiences.

Identification and Assessment

6. The Department of Education and school boards should review existing referral and assessment practices of school boards and develop uniform guidelines that
   - establish appropriate and timely referral and assessment practices
   - describe the ongoing link between assessment and instructional practices.

7. The Department of Education, university faculties of education, and school boards in consultation with teachers should collaborate to design, implement, and evaluate professional development opportunities for resource and classroom teachers, including institutes and courses on identification and assessment practices.

8. The Department of Education should set targets and provide financial support for appropriate numbers of qualified professionals in the school system to support the identification and assessment process. Geographic considerations should be incorporated into this process.

Program Planning

9. The Department of Education should establish a committee including the NSTU and school boards to review and recommend by November 1, 2001, ways to ensure that teachers have sufficient time available for program planning. The report of the committee should provide
   - options/effective practices to increase the time available to plan
   - clarification that 'contact time' includes time utilized for program planning
   - a communication/implementation plan

10. The Department of Education and school boards should develop and implement a guide for teachers, administrators, and professional support personnel, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of all involved in the program planning process.

Parental Involvement

11. The Department of Education, in consultation with the Special Education Programs and Services Committee (SEPS), should develop a guide for parents on the program planning process and the role of all partners in the process.

12. Each school board should develop and implement a strategy consistent with the guide to enhance meaningful parental involvement in the program planning process.

Interagency Collaboration

13. Government, through the Child and Youth Action Committee (CAYAC), should ensure interagency collaboration to enhance access to programs and services for children and youth with special needs. The following actions should be undertaken:
   - Revise and expand the handbook *Transition Planning in Nova Scotia* (1994). Transition procedures at school entry and school leaving should be outlined.
   - Develop collaborative practices with health professionals to ensure that recommendations made to schools are feasible and practical and consider the context of the school environment.
   - Identify and address the gaps in support for children and youth with special needs. This should include implementation of the recommendations in the report "Mental Health: A Time for Action," Bland and Dufton, May 2000.
   - Develop a mechanism for the provision of services and funding to support youth with disabilities aged 18–21 years old upon school leaving.

Resources and Supports

14. The Department of Education should define core services and desired service ratios (based on recognized professional standards) for professional staff at the school board and school levels.

15. The Department of Education should engage, on a short-term contract, a person with expertise and qualifications in the educational applications of assistive technology to design a framework for the acquisition, distribution, and provision of a full range of assistive technology devices and services for the P–12 school system.

16. The Department of Education and school boards should review and update the list of Authorized Learning Resources to facilitate access to appropriate multi-level resources are available for students and teachers in both English and French.

17. The Department of Education, in consultation with education partners, should develop programming guidelines and strategies to support students with behavioural challenges in the school system.

18. The Department of Eductation, through the Education Funding Committee, should address the issue of class size guidelines and related funding requirements.

Funding

19. The Department of Education should provide an immediate injection of $20 million in the 2002–03 fiscal year targeted to a base level of core services and appropriate service ratios.

20. Core services caseloads should be reviewed annually by the Special Education Programs and Services Committee to recommend appropriate service and funding levels to the Minister.

21. The Department of Education should cost the recommendations in the Special Education Implementation Review Committee (SEIRC) report and include them in the funding plan in time for the next budget cycle. The plan will identify how the additional funding should be targeted to address needs in the following priority areas:
    - professional development
    - support for emotionally/behaviourally challenged students based on:
        I. following guidelines developed by the department in consultation with school boards, teachers, and parents and
        II. proposals submitted by school boards reflecting effective practices
    - learning resources for students with special needs including a designated amount to be accessed at the school level
    - assistive technology
    - teacher time for program planning and implementation

22. Additional funding should be included in the resource credit allocation for schools to reflect the need for additional learning resources for students with special needs.

Programming Standards and Accountability

23. School boards should monitor Individual Program Plans (IPPs) to ensure that the outcomes developed and implemented are appropriate and measurable. In addition, a consistent system should be developed to track, monitor, and report to parents student progress and achievement on outcomes stated in IPPs.

24. As recommended in the *Post-Shapiro Review of Teacher Education in Nova Scotia, Oct 2000*, the Minister should ensure there is a mechanism to monitor pre-service teacher education programs and propose policy changes. All teachers who successfully complete an approved program of initial teacher education and are certified to teach in Nova Scotia should have undertaken coursework that addresses programming in special education and practica within inclusive settings that involves working with a diverse range of students who have special education needs.

25. Notwithstanding contractual agreements, the Department of Education should define or adopt, and school boards should adhere to, competencies and/or professional qualifications in hiring or assigning persons responsible for providing core special education services (e.g., resource teachers, speech language pathologists, school psychologists, student service coordinators).

26. School boards should ensure that each school implements "Tracking Our Progress" as part of their school improvement planning. School boards should submit an annual report on implementation to the Department of Education, which in turn will be shared with SEPS.

27. School boards should monitor resource teacher allocations in schools to ensure appropriate utilization of allocated staff and effective implementation of resource programs and services.

28. The Department of Education, in consultation with school boards, should identify core competencies for teacher assistants to be included in training programs for teacher assistants. These competencies should be required components in approved training programs.

29. School boards should develop short- and long-term plans for the provision of barrier-free access to, and within, educational facilities as mandated under Section 64(2)(e) of the Education Act and include updates on implementation of their plans as part of their annual report to the Minister of Education. The Department of Education should provide an annual update to be tabled each fall at a SEPS meeting regarding progress in both existing and new facilities in improving barrier-free access to public schools.

30. The department should table an annual report with SEPS on progress in implementing the special education policy and the recommendations in this report and on the resources provided to school boards and schools to assist in implementation.

31. The Department of Education, in consultation with the current SEPS committee, should review the role, mandate, and membership of the SEPS in light of the additional responsibilities recommended by this report.

Appeal Process

32. The Department of Education, in collaboration with school boards, should provide professional development for board office and school administrators and student services personnel in mediation skills to increase their ability to ensure that disputes regarding IPPs are resolved in a manner that is timely and minimizes the necessity of using the formal appeal process.

33. The Department of Education, in collaboration with school boards, should adopt mandatory procedures for the school board level appeal process that ensure timely resolution, specific recommendations, and parent involvement in selection of the review panel (similar to those afforded in the provincial appeal process).

34. The Department of Education and school boards should develop an information package on the appeal process to be distributed to parents in situations where there is an unresolved dispute regarding IPP outcomes or placement. The package should include all relevant board and department information in a format that provides parents with clear directions throughout the appeal process.

Background

Special education programming and services are a vital part of the education system. They are the people, programs, and material resources that support students with special needs and help ensure that every child is respected as part of the school community and encouraged to learn and achieve to his or her potential. Programming and services are based on the belief that the school is a place where all children can learn and where differences are cherished for the richness they bring.

As reported by school boards, approximately, 21 percent of students (32,802 for 1999–2000) in the public school system receive direct and/or consultative support such as services from resource teachers, speech language pathologists, school psychologists, and teacher assistants. However, this percentage includes students who receive more than one service and therefore are counted more than once. This inflates, to some degree, the overall numbers of students reported. In 1999–2000, 9.3 percent ($73,981,734) of the public school budget was expended to support students with special needs. The needs of these children and youth are varied and complex. So too are the range of services required to meet those needs, often necessitating the involvement of many partners and agencies—particularly in the areas of health, community services, justice, and sport and recreation. As well, the involvement of parents/guardians in planning and implementing programs is essential for a comprehensive and consistent approach.

The Special Education Policy was introduced in 1996. The main themes of the policy focus on program planning, parental involvement, and a collaborative team approach in the context of inclusive schooling. Implementing the policy has been an ongoing process since 1996 that includes many partners. At the same time public school education has undergone substantial structural, curriculum and funding changes.

Government's current priority for special education, as described in *Steady Leadership ... a clear course*, is to develop " ... a multi-year plan for addressing the need for additional resources for children with special needs." As part of that process, it was essential that the progress of policy implementation be reviewed. To that end, Education Minister Jane Purves initiated a provincial review in May 2000. The Special Education Implementation Review Committee (SEIRC) was established on June 16, 2000.

Mandate

The mandate of the Special Education Implementation Review Committee was to

- review research and best practices regarding special education programs and services
- review provincial statistical data on student services
- receive and review special education implementation reports from school boards
- review other recent reports and surveys on special education in Nova Scotia, including *Resistance and Acceptance: Educator Attitudes to Inclusion of Students with Disabilities*, Bunch et al, 1997; *Educators' Perceptions of the IPP Process*, NSTU, 1998; *Report to the Education Committee of the NSSBA from the Ad Hoc Committee on Inclusion*, NSSBA, 1999; *Tracking Our Progress*, Department of Education, 2000
- review recent special education reviews in other provinces
- report on the current status of the implementation of the policy
- identify the challenges to the provision of quality special education programs and services
- recommend options to overcome the barriers and ensure quality program and services are delivered in the most efficient way possible

Committee Membership

The core of the Special Education Implementation Review Committee was comprised of the members of the existing Special Education Programs and Services Committee (SEPS). SEPS acts in an information-sharing and supportive role to the Director of Student Services, Department of Education, and also reviews, monitors, and makes recommendations regarding programming and services for students with special needs. The membership of the SEIRC included representatives of parents, organizations representing children and youth with disabilities, school boards, teachers, universities, and government departments involved in providing services to children and youth with special needs. The list of members can be found in the Acknowledgements.

The first meeting of the review committee was held on August 30, 2000. A total of 16 meetings were held between that date and June 2, 2001.

Process

The review committee was provided with background information, which included pertinent legislation, various special education policy documents, and relevant reports from other provinces. In addition, the committee received copies of recent reports on special education and related issues prepared by the Nova Scotia Teachers Union (NSTU) and the Nova Scotia School Boards Association (NSSBA).

Committee members identified a number of areas in which they wished to receive additional information. Presentations on the following topics were incorporated into the meeting schedule:

- implementation initiatives on the *Special Education Policy Manual*

- interagency collaboration across government departments through the Child and Youth Action Committee (CAYAC)
- special education funding from the perspectives of the Department of Education and school boards
- child and youth mental health services—government and school board initiatives
- intensive behaviour intervention programming and strategies
- accountability model considerations
- models for tracking implementation at the school board and school levels

Obtaining public input was identified as an integral component of the review process. The committee considered what additional data was required and who could provide relevant input. The following strategy was developed to gather further information.

Survey Questionnaire

A brief background document and questionnaire was developed for distribution to the public and stakeholders. The document was developed with the direct input of the committee and was designed to be easily understood by those not directly involved in the public school system and to allow for open-ended responses to key issues regarding special education policy implementation.

Respondents were asked to consider eight policy-related areas and to provide feedback on implementation as to what they believed to be the most significant improvements and difficulties in supporting children and youth with special needs since 1996. They were also asked to provide suggestions for improving programming and services. The eight areas for consideration included the following:

- identification and assessment
- program planning process
- parental involvement
- programming standards and accountability
- resources, supports, physical accessibility
- funding
- inclusive schooling
- appeal process

The request for input via the questionnaire was advertised in newspapers across the province and was made accessible through schools, the NSTU, organizations representing children and youth with special needs, public libraries, Access Nova Scotia sites, school board offices, and the Department of Education. To elicit comments from the Mi'kmaw population, questionnaires were sent directly to representatives of that community. In addition, the document was made available through the department's web site and could be completed on line.

Focus Groups

A focus group process was initiated to explore issues in more depth with parents, students, teachers, teacher assistants, school and student services administrators, school board members, and other professionals who serve students with special needs. In addition, focus groups sessions were conducted for Acadian, Francophone, and African Nova Scotian representatives to ensure that their voices were heard. Experienced facilitators were engaged to conduct the sessions, and a facilitator's manual regarding the process was developed. Focus group participants were provided with background information and led through key areas related to policy implementation. This process provided the opportunity to comment on special education implementation and to identify what is working and what needs improvement and to make suggestions on how to improve programming and services. Participants in the focus groups were selected with input from school boards, the unions involved, school advisory councils, and home and school associations. Members from the SEIRC participated as observers in focus group sessions, which were held with each of the groups identified in each of the school board regions. Department of Education staff served as recorders for the sessions.

More than 1,300 written submissions were returned to the department. The responses were coded based on a scheme representing the key elements of the special education policy and according to responses that identified improvements, difficulties, and suggestions for improvement. In similar fashion, the results of the 47 focus group sessions involving approximately 560 people were summarized as to what is working well, what needs improvement, and suggestions on how improvements should be made. An interim report outlining major themes and trends that emerged from a preliminary review of the information gathered was submitted to the Minister of Education in December 2000.

Dr. Victor Thiessen, Chairperson, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Dalhousie University, was contracted by the Department of Education to review and analyse the data from both the survey questionnaire and focus group sessions. Dr. Thiessen provided a report of his findings to the committee in March 2001.

The committee reviewed the information gathered through the questionnaires and from the focus groups. Based on that and on its own deliberations, the committee identified the key challenges to full implementation of the policy. The committee concluded its work by formulating recommendations on ways to address these challenges. These are presented in the section on the Analysis of Surveys and Focus Groups. The report is divided into the following sections: Executive Summary, Background, Historical Context, Principles and Beliefs, Current Programs and Services, Effective/Promising Practices, Analysis of Survey Questionnaires and Focus Groups, and Recommendations.

Special Education Programming and Services

Historical Context of Special Education

Canada

Canada's first steps in special education were based not on principles of human rights nor upon educational theories, but rather on 19th-century society's belief in an institutional responsibility towards individuals with disabilities. By the end of World War I, the motivation for addressing the special needs of individuals had evolved to a more humanitarian ideal. To that end, it became common in Canada to aim for the employment of individuals with sensory impairments or intellectual disabilities by providing industrial training. However, it would be decades before the needs of individuals with learning disabilities or emotional/behavioural challenges would be given attention and consideration.

A fundamental shift in special education policy and practices occurred in Canada in the 1960s and '70s. The impetus for this shift arose from changes in societal attitudes, as well as, from a number of provincial and national reports, listed below, which had implications for special education.

Date	Report	Implications for Special Education
1968	*Living and Learning* (Hall, Dennis)	Emphasis on the right of all children to a free and appropriate public education
1971	One Million Children (Roberts and Lazure)	Recommendations for acknowledging the right to free public education, integration of students, and instruction based on individual learning needs rather than a category of disability
1971	*Standards for Educating Exceptional Children in Canada* (Hardy, et al) Emphasis on inclusion of special	education as part of the pre-service training of teachers, role of resource teachers, and the importance of collaboration in planning and programming

The single most influential event on special education in Canada in the 1980s was the enactment of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Section 15, Equality Rights, served as a foundation for the movement towards the inclusion of persons with disabilities as fully participating members of Canadian society. By the end of the 1980s, all provinces and territories were providing special education programming in public school systems, with all but a few having passed mandatory legislation to guarantee programming for students with special needs. Throughout the 1990s, there has been a continued emphasis across Canada on the development and implementation of policies and practices to enhance standards of programming and services in an inclusive context for students with special needs.

Nova Scotia

In Nova Scotia, passage of the Education Act (1967) mandated access to public education for children with exceptionalities. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) praised Nova Scotia as being one of only two provinces with this provision; however, advocates observed that it still allowed for certain exemptions. A significant advance occurred in 1973 with the adoption of Regulation 7 (c) (instruction for physically or mentally handicapped children), which added the education of exceptional children to the responsibilities of school boards.

The Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA) was established in 1975. While school districts were recognized as the jurisdictions having responsibility for the education of students, programs and services were designed to support school districts in serving students who were deaf/hearing impaired or who were blind/visually impaired.

In 1981 the Nova Scotia Commission on School Finance (the Walker Commission) included among its recommendations the call for special education grant funding, based on a school board's total student enrolment, and designated specifically to supplement programs and services for students with special needs. An amendment to the Education Act introduced in 1986, Regulation 6(e), made it mandatory for school boards to provide special education programs and services to students " ... who are capable of benefiting from such programs and services." While this regulation seemed to be clear that boards were required to provide for the education of exceptional students, its weakness was that boards still had discretion in terms of deciding whether individual students had the capacity to benefit.

The Department of Education issued a *Statement on Integration* in 1991, which represented a philosophical change in educational values, practices, and expectations regarding students with special needs. It stated, in part, that

> ... The issue no longer is whether most students with exceptional needs should or should not be integrated, but what support is needed for integration to be successful.

In 1996, a new Education Act stipulated that boards must "make provision for the instruction of all students enrolled in its schools and programs" and "develop and implement educational programs for students with special needs within regular instructional settings with their peers in age, in accordance with the regulations and the Minister's policies and guidelines." [Section 64 2(a) and (d)] This legislation established the responsibility of teachers to participate in the development and implementation of individual program plans for students with special needs. Parents and school boards were also afforded a process of appeal regarding a student placement and/or individual program plan outcomes.

The *Special Education Policy Manual* was developed in 1996 after an extensive consultation process that included parents, school boards, teachers, and advocacy groups. This policy manual, which was implemented in 1996, serves as a guide for the development of educational programming for students with special needs. It promotes the principle of inclusion and enables parents to participate in the individual program planning team process.

Principles and Beliefs

The development, implementation, and evaluation of programming and services for students with special needs are guided by principles and beliefs embedded in both legislation and policy. The department's philosophy and vision with regard to student services is outlined in the *Public School Programs* document (PSP) and the *Special Education Policy Manual*. The Special Education Policy has legislative foundations in the Education Act and Regulations, which were rewritten in the mid 1990s. The PSP is based on principles of learning and essential graduation learnings that form the basis for planning for all students. As is common in provinces across Canada, Nova Scotia supports an inclusive approach to meeting the needs of all students, recognizing that a continuum of programs and services will be required to meet diverse needs. The goal of inclusive schooling is to facilitate the membership, participation, and learning of all students in school programs and activities. Support services are coordinated, to the extent possible, within neighbourhood schools and within grade level/ subject area classrooms. The principles and beliefs are articulated in the following.

Charter of Rights and Freedoms

> Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.
>
> [Section 15 (1)]

Education Act (1995–96)

The Education Act articulates the roles and responsibilities of school boards, school administrators, teachers, students, and parents within the public school system. These roles and responsibilities as they pertain specifically to the education of students with special needs are defined in the context of an inclusive approach, meaningful involvement of all team members in the program planning process, and individualized program planning. Supporting the context are the premises upon which the act is based, which include

- meaningful partnerships among and participation by education stakeholders
- the right and responsibility of students to participate fully in learning opportunities

- the right and responsibility of parents to support their children in achieving learning success and to participate in decisions that affect their children
- consideration by the education community, in making decisions, of the diverse nature and heritage of society in Nova Scotia
- commitment by the education system to fair and equitable participation and benefit by all people in Nova Scotia

Public School Programs 2000–2001

... all children in Nova Scotia need a broad-based, quality education. Quality in education is demonstrated by the excellence of individual courses, programs, and shared experiences. Quality is also demonstrated by the diversity of educational experiences in which students are actively involved and by the extent to which individual student needs are met.

Special Education Policy Manual

The introductory section of the policy manual includes the following statement of principles, which has guided the development and implementation of the policy:

- **Right to an Appropriate Education**
  the fundamental educational human right of every individual to have their unique learning needs responded to on an individual basis

- **Right to Quality Education and Qualified Teachers**
  a right to be taught by licensed, qualified teachers who are responsible for ensuring that the outcomes of the program match, as much as possible, student strengths and needs

- **Inclusive Schooling**
  the goal of which is the facilitation of the membership, participation, and learning of all students in school programs and activities

- **Teachers' Responsibility**
  the responsibility for all students placed under their supervision and care, including responsibility for safety and well-being, as well as program planning, implementation, and evaluation

- **Parental Involvement**
  the parents as an integral part of their child's education and their involvement in program planning from the outset

- **Individual Program Plan and Accountability**
  the development, implementation, and evaluation of Individual Program Plans (IPPs), which strengthen student/teacher accountability

- **Collaboration**
  the essential component in supporting students with special needs and ensuring a coordinated and consistent approach to program planning and service delivery

Current Programs and Services

Department of Education Responsibilities

The Department of Education is responsible for establishing provincial policies and guidelines regarding programming and services for students with special needs. In fulfilling this mandate, the department carries out policy directions of the government and Minister of Education and coordinates with other government departments in the delivery of services for students with special needs. The vehicle for coordination across government departments is the Child and Youth Action Committee (CAYAC).

The Student Services Division was established in 1992 and is a part of the Program Branch of the Department of Education. The Student Services Division provides direction and leadership to school boards regarding the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies, programs, and services in the areas of Comprehensive Guidance and Counselling, English as a Second Language, Multicultural Education, Special Education, and other support services to students. The Division consults, liaises, and communicates with its partners and the public to ensure a coordinated and collaborative approach in implementing its mandate.

School Board Responsibilities

School boards are required to provide appropriate programming for all students with special needs. The annual special education grant allocated to boards is used to assist with the cost of providing special education programming and services, including board-level administrative support. The goal of inclusive schooling, which is to facilitate the membership, participation, and learning of all students in school programs and activities, serves as the philosophical context for these programs and services.

To assist in carrying out their mandate regarding students with special needs, school boards access the following external resources:

- consultation and professional development services from the Department of Education
- community and interagency support
- services provided for students with visual and/or hearing impairments by the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA)

Continuum of Programming Options and Services

As stated in the Special Education Policy, the goal of inclusive schooling is to facilitate the membership, participation, and learning of all students in school programs and activities. The implementation of inclusive education looks different for each student depending on the outcomes developed to meet their needs and the settings in which these outcomes can be met. In each individual case, the principle of "only as special as necessary" should be employed. Envisioned as a continuum, this starts with the grade level/subject area classroom where students participate independently in class with adaptations in instructional strategies and evaluation techniques implemented by the classroom teacher.

When it is determined by the program planning team that adaptations in the classroom are not sufficient to meet the student's needs, additional supports may be needed. The program planning team considers a range of supports including options in programming and settings necessary to meet the student's needs. In all cases, it is necessary for the program planning team to monitor and adjust programming and settings on an ongoing basis. The range of supports includes, but is not limited to, assistive technology, additional teaching materials, resource teachers, speech-language pathologists, school psychologists, and teacher assistants. These supports can be provided in a variety of ways, in a variety of settings, including, but not limited to

- consultative services to classroom teachers
- co-teaching
- short-term/partial withdrawal to address specific learning outcomes
- temporary placements in specialized programs and short-term residential placements

When students receive specific programming outside the classroom or neighbourhood school setting, the team is responsible for incorporating outcomes and strategies in the plan that address how and when a student will transition back to a more inclusive setting. In all cases, it is necessary to consider maximizing student growth and moving students toward independence and self-advocacy.

Staffing/Funding

School boards are allocated a special education grant to assist in the provision of programs and services for students with special needs. The grant is based on the total school population in each board and is intended to enhance the basic operating grant. In fact, school boards expend more than the special education grant in meeting special needs on an annual basis. Tables 1 and 2 show the number of students who received direct and consultative services in the public school system in 1999–2000.

Table 1
Number of Students Receiving Direct Services, 1999–2000
(Students may be included in more than one category)

Service	Total Receiving Service	Total Wait List
Special Education (congregated setting at least 50% of time)	1005	33
Resource (provided by Resource teacher 2 or more times/cycle)	17499	3129
Severe Learning Disability Support (provided by LD specialist)	659	149
Reading Recovery™	1792	415
Speech Language Pathology	3990	1288
English as a Second Language (provided by ESL teacher)	625	44
School Psychology	3027	1490
Teacher Assistant	5070	383
Students with Individual Program Plans	4030	386
Junior and Senior High Students with Transition Plans	1067	120

Provincial Student Services Survey 1999–2000

Table 2
Number of Students for Whom Consultative Services Were Provided
(Students may be included in more than one category)

Service	Total # Students for Whom Consultative Services Were Provided	Total Wait List
Resource	5860	523
Severe Learning Disability Support	189	34
Speech Language Pathology	1465	708
English as a Second Language	122	11
School Psychology	2402	457

Provincial Student Services Survey 1999–2000

Staffing/Funding
(continued)

The Special Education Grant to school boards for 2000–01 was $41,519,300. In 1999–2000 expenditures in special education reported by the school boards was $73,981,734. This amounted to 9.3 percent of total school board expenditures. Within parameters set by the Department of Education (Policy 1.3, *Special Education Policy Manual*), school boards decide how to expend the grant, although in 1999–2000 teacher assistant and resource teacher costs made up approximately 88 percent of the special education expenditures as reported by school boards across the province. Table 3 shows provincial totals for special education staffing from 1993–94 to 1999–2000.

Table 3
Provincial Totals for Special Education Staffing
1993–2000 Full Time Equivilent (FTE) Figures

	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	%Change 1993–2000
Supervisors	25.85	21.15	18.15	17	16.1	17.6	18.8	-27.3%
Specialists (S! P, Ed. Psych, SW)	123.68	112.63	110.7	112.2	113.4	113.6	114.8	-7.2%
Teachers(Special Education)	677.921	629.641	601.681	616.6	684.8*	655.99	701.08	+3.4%
Others	12	7	7.95	9.9	14.1	15	20.4	+70%
Total Professionals	839.451	770.421	738.481	750.7	822.4	802.19	855.08	+1.9%
Teacher Assistants	718.82	720.36	758.76	878.1	1115.1	1408.9	1515.21	+110.8%
Provincial Enrolment	165,890	164,443	164,020	163,941	162,359	160,011	158205	-4.6%

*Note: 34 positions are due to extra funding designated for Severe Learning Disabilities (SLD) which came fully into effect in 1997–98. In addition, an additional $2 million was earmarked for special education in 1997–98.

The Department of Education also provides annual grants for the following:

- programming for students with severe learning disabilities, $1.3 million
- Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority, ($7.6 million in 2000-01)
- support for students in government-run youth programs and services such as the IWK Child Life Program, Community Services settings, and youth offender institutions, ($576,000 in 2000-01)

In addition, over $1 million has been allocated to boards for professional development for special education policy implementation since 1996.

The pressures on special education services have increased over the past decade. This can be attributed to a number of factors, including better knowledge and advocacy on the part of parents, early identification, increased retention of students into secondary schools, a rise in the incidence of specific special needs (e.g., emotional/behavioural difficulties, autism), the introduction of policies and procedures to focus on quality programming for students with special needs, and overall increases in class size throughout the education system. At the same time, resources have been eroded in critical areas required to support the system.

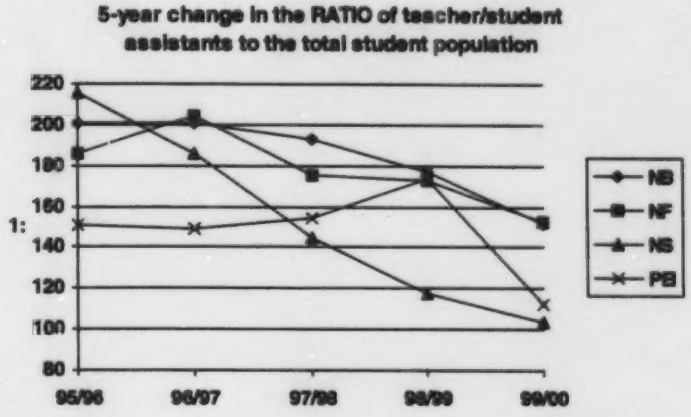
The review has demonstrated that the need for additional resources, both human and material, is a priority among all groups who responded. As noted in the Special Education Implementation Review Interim Report, December 2000:

> For more than five years the Funding Review Group has identified the need for additional special education funding. In 1996 it was noted that school boards spent $16.4 million more on special education services than was provided for in the grant. It was also identified that a move to ratio-based funding for targeted special education services could require $38 million or more of additional funding.
>
> In 1998 the need for $32.2 million in additional funding was identified, a figure which was repeated by the Work Group in 1999. This figure was comprised of the then current $16.5 million difference between the special education grant and actual expenditures plus $15.7 million required for additional services for early intervention and extensive supports for students with more severe needs. ... There is a critical shortage of funding for special education, as noted by the Funding Review Work Group since 1996. **This lack of resources is jeopardizing the implementation of the policy which has an impact on all students, not just those with special needs.** There is also a perception that resources are not distributed equitably across the province or among services. In addition there is need for funding strategies to be sufficiently flexible to address situations in individual schools and to meet ever changing demands.

It should be noted that the above quote is in reference to two areas only—early intervention and extensive supports—and did not address minimum required ratios.

Between 1993–94 and 1999–2000, the total number of professionals providing special education services in the public school system in Nova Scotia rose by 1.9 percent from 839.45 FTEs to 855.08 FTEs. During the same period, the number of teacher assistants in the public school system increased by 110.8 percent from 718.82 FTEs to 1515.21 FTEs*. This represents an average ratio of 1:104 per total student population. This is the highest number of teacher assistants per capita of the four Atlantic provinces. The cost for teacher assistant services for the 1999–2000 year was $26,860,000. Figure 1 shows a comparison across the four Atlantic provinces of the changes in the teacher assistant ratios to total student population since 1995–96.

Figure 1



During deliberations concerning funding recommendations, SEIRC reviewed the current status of programs and services in relation to appropriate professional service ratios. These ratios are required to meet student needs. As per Table 4 below, to meet these service ratios, a total of $67,437,300 million is required. When the $26,860,000 cost of teacher assistant services is added, the total is $94,297,300. This means an injection of approximately $20 million is immediately needed over the amount currently expended ($73,981,734 during 1999–2000) to meet minimum ratios.

*Using a standard five-hour day, 1515.21 FTE converts to 1735.5 FTE.

Table 4
Implementation of Special Education Policy
Minimum Required Professional Service Ratios

Service	1999–2000 Ratio	Minimum Recommended Ratio	Number of FTEs 1999–2000	Number of FTEs to Meet Minimum Required Ratio	Gap	Projected Total Cost for Professional Services
Resource	1:253[1]	1:165[5]	625.78	958.8	333	$52,734,000
Speech/Language	1:2968[2]	1:2000[6]	53.3	79.1	25.8	$4,350,500
Psychology and Educational Assessment	1:3072[3]	1:2500	51.5	63.28	11.78	$3,480,400
Special Education	1:13[4]	1:10	75.3	103.8[7]	28.5	$5,200,000
Student Services Administration	1:8415	1:7000	18.8	22.6	3.8	$1,672,400

1. Range: 1:211–1:324
2. Range: 1:1737–1:4510
3. Range: 1:2157–1:4650
4. Based on reported total of 1005 students in congregated settings 50 percent of school day or more
5. Based on 18 percent of student population receiving service and a caseload of 30
6. Recommended by Canadian Speech Language Pathologists Association, 1990
7. Waiting list of 33 students included in calculation

Effective/Promising Practices

This section reviews research and "best practices," currently referred to as "effective" or "promising practices," regarding special education programs and services in relation to the public school system. Research on the literature related to meeting student needs, teaming, collaboration, parental involvement, individual program planning, leadership, and accountability was undertaken over several months by staff and researchers at the Department of Education.

Addressing Diversity in Inclusive Schooling

Inclusive Approach

Literature on service delivery models for students with special needs and their preparation for post-school experiences consists of reviews and meta-analyses that tend to favour the beneficial effects of an inclusive approach to education on the basis of academic and social outcomes (Carlberg and Kavale 1980; Baker, Wang, and Walberg 1994–95). A study done in 1989 followed the employment rate for high school graduates with special needs. The researcher found that the employment rate for those who had been educated in segregated programs was 53% while the rate for those in 'integrated programs' was 73% (Piuma, 1989). Researchers studied students placed in self-contained classrooms with programs in which life skills and age-appropriate behaviour were stressed. They found that the students were failing to retain these skills, or that they could not be replicated outside the classroom (Lipsky and Gartner 1989; Stainback, Stainback, and Forest 1989; Wagner 1989). The students' sense of belonging to the larger community had not been forged, thus hampering their transition to community life. Norman Kunc strongly believes that education needs to pay attention to Maslow's extensive research that validates belonging as a precursor to the development of self-esteem and motivation in the pursuit of education (Kunc 1992).

What do students and educators believe about inclusive education? In the Nova Scotia Teachers Union report *Educators' Perceptions of the IPP Process*, 1998, Carmel French, Ph.D., indicates that generally teachers view inclusion in a positive way, when necessary resources and supports are in place.

> Educators from all respondent groups commented on the positive impact on other students having a fellow student with special needs in their class. They noted that students began to appreciate everyone's strengths and needs and accept inclusion. Students also learned that success is relative, and that we all can learn and succeed in our own way. Educators observed that inclusion promoted awareness and acceptance of the diverse needs of others and at the same time increased students' knowledge about individual differences and tolerance.

This is supported by an earlier national study done by Bunch et al, 1997. They state:

> Regardless of the aspect of inclusive practice considered, workload and support concerns were brought out by many study participants. However, educators in both traditionally and inclusively structured systems felt inclusive practice possible, beneficial, and appropriate if supports were in place.

Differentiating Instruction

Classrooms of the 21st century are notable for the diversity of student backgrounds, interests, and experiences. In such environments there can be no 'one-size-fits all' approach to instruction and assessment; however differentiating instruction is considered to be the foundation for meeting diverse student needs. Much has been written and researched in the area. Carol Anne Tomlinson, considered to be a leader in this area, describes differentiation as follows:

> It is not an instructional strategy. It is not what a teacher does when he or she has time. It is a way of thinking about teaching and learning. It is a philosophy. As such, it is based on a set of beliefs:
> - Students who are the same age differ in their readiness to learn, their interests, their styles of learning, their experiences, and their life circumstances.
> - The differences in students are significant enough to make a major impact on what students need to learn, the pace at which they need to learn it, and the support they need from teachers and others to learn it well.
> - Students will learn best when supportive adults push them slightly beyond where they can work without assistance.
> - Students will learn best when they can make a connection between the curriculum and their interests and life experiences.
> - Students will learn best when learning opportunities are natural.
> - Students are more effective learners when classrooms and schools create a sense of community in which students feel significant and respected.
> - The central job of schools is to maximize the capacity of each student.
>
> ... these things are unlikely to happen for the full range of students unless curriculum and instruction fit each individual, unless students have choices about what to learn and how, unless students take part in setting learning goals, and unless the classroom connects with the experiences and interests of the individual. (Tomlinson 2000)

Research demonstrates that many effective strategies for students with special needs are effective for all students. Differentiating instruction and assessment is the application of the learning principle "Learners have different ways of knowing and representing knowledge" (PSP 1999–2000).

Inclusive Schools

What can we expect classrooms to look like where teaching and learning recognizes the different abilities and talents of students? How can we approach and assess learning to allow a wider range of students to successfully participate in classroom learning? Howard Gardner, in responding to educators' use of his research on multiple intelligences, states:

> ... I would be happy to send my children to a school with the following characteristics: differences among youngsters are taken seriously, knowledge about differences is shared with children and parents, children gradually assume responsibility for their own learning, and materials that are worth knowing are presented in ways that afford each child the maximum opportunity to master those materials and to show others (and themselves) what they have learned and understood. (Gardner 1995)

Carol Ann Tomlinson and M. Layne Kalbfleisch suggest that in a school such as the one described by Gardner we would find that:

- Students and teachers continually work to accept and appreciate one another's similarities and differences—to be respectful of one another.
- Teachers are hunters and gatherers who energetically continue to find out all they can about students' current readiness, interests and learning profiles.
- Teachers use what they learn about students to provide varied learning options and build learning experiences around the important concepts of the content.
- All students take part in the respectful learning experiences that are equitable, interesting, equally important, and equally powerful.
- Student use essential skills to address open-ended problems designed to help them make sense of key concepts and principles.
- Teachers often present several learning options at different degrees of difficulty to ensure appropriate challenge for students at varied readiness levels.
- Teachers often give students choices about topics of study, ways of learning, modes of expression and writing conditions.
- Teachers present information in varied ways, for example, orally, visually, through demonstration, part to whole, and whole to part. Instructional approaches invite attention to individual needs, for example, learning contracts, graduated rubrics, complex instruction, entry points, and problem-based learning.
- Students work as collaborators with classmates and teachers—to make sure everyone grows.
- Teachers serve as coaches who attend to individuals as well as to the whole class. The goals of teachers are to meet all students at their starting points and to move each one along a continuum of growth as far and as quickly as possible. Learning has no ceiling.
- Teachers may assign students to groups on a random basis or on the basis of similar interests, mixed interests, similar learning profile, or mixed learning profile. Sometimes teachers constitute the groups on the basis of an assessed perception of need, sometimes students themselves select the groups.

- Teachers design homework to extend the individual's understanding and skill level.
- Varied assessment options are common, for example, portfolios, authentic problems to solve, oral presentations and tests.
- Grades—or reports to parents, whatever form they take—are based, at least in large measures, on individual growth.
  (Tomlinson and Kalbfleisch 1998)

Schools that have these characteristics seek to ensure that students are at the centre when making decisions regarding programs, service delivery and the ways in which schools encourage student participation and involvement. In the *Health of Canada's Children* (3rd edition, 2000), Dan Offord notes that "data indicates that children who are strongly connected to schools do better than those who are not. A challenge for schools and communities is to find strategies that reduce the number of children and youth who are marginalized in these settings and who do not participate fully in the available activities."

For the most part, the challenges schools face in supporting diverse needs are known, as are the characteristics of schools and teacher variables that support diverse learners. The real challenge lies in implementing what the research tells us in order to effect changes in practice.

Team Building—Involving Parents

Research overwhelmingly demonstrates that for all students parent involvement in learning is positively related to achievement. Karen Mapp points out that studies conducted over the last 30 years have identified a relationship between parent involvement and increased student achievement, enhanced self-esteem, improved behaviour, and better school attendance (Mapp 1997). In her research, Joyce Epstein reports that teachers have indicated to her that their lives are made easier if they get help from parents. She has also found that involved parents have more positive views of teachers (Epstein 1992). Epstein urges schools to assess present practices by asking questions about how effectively they are reaching out to parents.

In *Strong Families, Strong Schools* (a US report reflecting 30 years of research), family involvement is identified as complementary to school improvement efforts designed to improve students' learning (Ballen and Moles, National Family Initiative of the US Department on Education, September 1994). Most importantly, studies show that what the family does to support learning is more important to student success than family income or education. This is true whether the family is rich or poor, whether the parents finished high school or not, or whether the child is in preschool or in the upper grades (Coleman 1966; Epstein 1991, Stevenson and Baker 1987; deKanter, Binsburg, and Milne 1987 Henderson and Derla 1994; Kater and Kater 1993; Liontos 1992; Walberg n.d.).

Collaborative Program Planning

Throughout both Canada and the United States, educational jurisdictions have mandated written individualized program plans when assessments identify the need for programming to support students with special needs. The program planning process is overwhelmingly being carried out by multidisciplinary teams including the child's parents, teachers, and relevant professional support personnel, etc. Critical to the process is provision for regular review of progress. Increasingly, jurisdictions are incorporating outcomes into educational plans to facilitate students' transitions into school, during school and from school to community.

Although research specific to the effectiveness of individualized program planning is limited, a review of the literature identifies common characteristics of effective program planning. These include

- parents as partners for advocacy, information, team planning and feedback.
- the development of a foundation in education for all students (In Nova Scotia, the Essential Graduation Learnings outlined in *Public School Programs* provide that foundation.)
- the development of the design and delivery of effective program plans through a collaborative team approach (Villa and Thousand 1992; Thousand, Villa and Nevin 1994).
- successful management of potentially damaging issues that may materialize in development of program plans
- effective program planning team meetings
- individualized program plans that include
  - the student's present level of performance validated by timely identification and assessment
  - the student's unique educational characteristics and needs
  - outcomes that respond to these characteristics and needs
- statements of needed transition services designed within an outcome-oriented process that promote movements within school, between schools, and from school to post-secondary activities

Leadership That Supports Diversity

Research clearly points to school leadership as a key role in successful programming and service delivery for students with special needs. Practices such as collaborative planning and problem solving to respond to diverse needs are very much dependent on the leadership of the school principal. This is not to suggest that the principal alone is responsible for changing practice. More success is experienced when a principal assumes responsibility for making vision building a collective exercise (Fullen 1992). Such an approach to vision building for school restructuring goes hand-in-hand with the collaborative team approach to eff ctive program development. With a vision embracing long range, continuous improvement, the principal can take an active and positive role in the process of supporting what research has identified as effective practices to enhance student learning. Researchers have found repeatedly that inclusive programming is not likely to be successful if the principal does not take an active and positive role in the process.

Research in Canada reflects that the most progressive schools are ones with school administrators demonstrating, as these teachers suggest, a commitment to inclusionary education (Perner 1991).

Accountability

Accountability in the public school system involves the effective delivery of educational programs and services at school, regional, and provincial levels. The growing demands for school systems to be more accountable to governments, taxpayers, and parents are most often reflected in calls for the raising of educational standards to improve performance outcomes for students. Erickson (1997) defines the concept of accountability as "the use of systematic methods to inform those inside and outside the educational system that schools are moving in desired directions." He goes on to suggest that recent interest in accountability is "in response to public perceptions that educators are not being held responsible enough for student academic performance and that students themselves are not taking enough responsibility for their efforts."

System accountability refers to measures of effectiveness that are intended to hold schools and districts accountable by focussing on resources used, processes, and specific program outcomes (Roach et al. 1997). New models of accountability are placing emphasis on outcomes indicators in addition to input and process indicators. The Consortium on Inclusive Schooling Practices *Issue Brief* 3(2), April 2000, summarizes these indicators as follows:

Input Indicators

Schools collect data on a variety of factors to better target program resources (e.g., staff, instruction, and resources allocated to each child) and monitor violations of equity in education. For example, Maryland's accountability database includes data on resources, including money spent per pupil, student to staff ratios, and instructional time. Data also are collected on student characteristics such as change of residence; the number of students with limited English proficiency; the number of students receiving special education services; the number enrolled in special education...and, of course, the number of students with disabilities.

Process Indicators

Many educators indicate that one type of information needed is the extent to which students with disabilities have "an opportunity to learn." Typically, they are referring to exposure to curriculum, time spent in school and in special education settings, and dollars spent on education. Many assert that states should collect data on the extent to which students with disabilities are integrated into special education. Along with this, they suggest that we ought to know the extent to which Individualized Education Plan (IEPs) translate into instruction, and that one source of information on how well education is working for these students would be the number of students who meet IEP objectives.

Outcome Indicators

There clearly is a new way of thinking about accountability. Many educators are moving toward including what they consider to be the most critical type of data needed in making decisions about educational effectiveness, namely, outcome data. They maintain that they would believe education was working well for all students if those with disabilities were becoming proficient in academic and functional skills, achieving social and emotional outcomes, and generalizing what they learn in school to life outside the classroom. They also indicate that data on the transition out of school should be collected from follow-up studies of student and parent satisfaction; access to post-secondary education; impact studies on student employment, independent living, and community participation; and an analysis from the private sector of the extent students with disabilities meet the needs of the labour market.

One example of a provincial approach to the identification of effective practices in the area of accountability comes from *Best Practices for Inclusion*, 1994, New Brunswick Department of Education:

- School districts are accountable to the Department of Education, parents and the public for effective delivery of programs and services that improve learning outcomes for exceptional children.
- School districts have a plan to assess and report on progress towards best practices that span a three- to five-year period.
- Schools regularly review progress towards best practices in programs and services, student performance with respect to IEPs or other learning outcomes, follow-up plans for transition of exceptional students to another class or different levels of schooling, and progress of former students to another level of schooling.
- Schools prepare and disseminate to parents, district office staff and the community appropriate information on progress towards best practices on a regular basis.
- Schools engage parents, students and community members periodically (every three to five years) in a process to determine whether new needs have emerged, whether priorities or emphases need to be altered and whether equity is pursued.

An emerging issue in debates on system accountability is whether or not students with disabilities are included in system-wide assessments (Allen 2000). Ysseldyke, National Centre on Educational Outcomes, maintains that we do not have system accountability if we do not account for all students (Ysseldyke 1994). This does not mean that we must test or assess all students in the same way; however, we must be able to report on the progress of all students in order to carry true system accountability. Stephen Elliott, co-author of an assessment and accountability guide for the state of Wisconsin, puts the issue simply: "If you're not counted, you don't count." (Allen 2000)

Continuous Monitoring of Our Progress

Characteristics frequently occurring in a review of provincial and state practices in monitoring progress for students with special needs include

- developing individual program plans (IPPs) using an outcomes framework linked to a core foundation or essential graduation learnings
- referencing present level of performance in an individualized program plan precisely enough to make measuring progress more user-friendly for the program planning team
- using an outcomes framework that links the IPP to system accountability processes in place for all students
- ensuring that regular checks on progress on IPPs coincide with established reporting periods
- communicating progress to parents on an ongoing basis
- aligning progress reporting procedures with department, board, and school policies on reporting student progress
- ensuring that principles of fairness, human rights, and freedom from bias are applied
- aligning evaluations with performance expectations so that the results are meaningful and defensible
- using assessments and evaluations to determine the need to maintain, alter, and/or eliminate supports and services listed in the IPP

Analysis of Survey Questionnaires and Focus Group Information

A total of 1,308 written submissions were received in response to advertised requests for information and mail-outs. Forty-seven focus groups were held across the province to collect and receive input from a variety of partners and special interest groups. The analysis of this data was carried out by Victor Thiessen and Barbara Cottrell, Meta Research and Communications. This section was written by Thiessen and Cottrell and comprises their analysis of the data received. The section of their analysis outlining the procedures used in the process, constituencies, and details on focus groups can be found in the appendixes to this report.

Findings

It is to be expected that a call for submissions for a review of any program will be seen as an opportunity to raise issues and voice concerns. Hence, it is more likely that persons with complaints than with praise will respond. This should be kept in mind, especially with respect to the written submissions, when assessing the views expressed.

The findings and conclusions in this review are based on both the written submissions and the focus groups. Generally, the views obtained from the one data source are mirrored in the other data source. The written submissions, coming from a more representative sample, are used for most numeric estimates. The focus groups are sometimes more informative for specific assessments and recommendations. Since all participants in each of a given focus group were members of the same constituency, they are especially valuable for detecting policy issues that might be constituency-specific.

Significant Improvements

Survey respondents were asked "What do you believe have been the most significant improvements in supporting children and youth with special needs in schools since 1996?" As an aid to help them organize their responses, and to ensure that they addressed the relevant policy areas, respondents were asked to consider eight areas when responding to this question. The eight areas, together with the percentage of respondents mentioning that significant improvements had been made in these areas, are shown in Table 5.

Out of the 1,308 submissions, 984 respondents (75 percent) indicated one or more areas of significant improvement. This leaves the question why the remaining 25 percent failed to answer this question. Two plausible reasons present themselves. The first is that these respondents did not possess sufficient information about the special education policies and their implementations to be willing to offer an opinion. The second is that they felt insufficient progress had been made to warrant naming any area as

having shown significant improvement. Which of these two reasons is the primary one cannot be ascertained with the data at hand. However, even if we assume that the second reason held for most of them, it would still mean that at least three out of every four respondents felt significant progress had been made in one or more areas.

Table 5
Areas of Most Significant Improvement

	%	N
Identification and assessment	27	268
Program planning process	36	360
Parental involvement	24	235
Programming standards and accountability	13	127
Resources, supports, physical accessibility	31	308
Funding	4	41
Inclusive schooling	36	353
Appeal process	1	11

Note: N refers to the number of cases in which this area was mentioned as having shown significant improvement. The same is true for the percentages. The percentages do not add to 100, since some respondents named more than one area of most significant improvement.

Respondents were most likely to mention the program planning process as the area of most significant improvement, followed closely by progress in inclusive schooling, with both areas mentioned in more than 350 submissions. The appeal process was least often mentioned as an area that has improved, but this is a misleading statistic: only those who were involved in appeal processes before and after 1996 would be competent to make a judgment in this area. We do not know how many respondents this would be. All we know is that 11 respondents indicated the appeal process had significantly improved[1]. In light of the fact that increasing parental involvement is printed in bold type in the policy document, it is of some concern that only 235 respondents identified this as one of the most significant areas of improvement. This is particularly so in light of the fact that increasing parental involvement does not incur additional financial outlays.

Funding is very seldom mentioned as an area of significant improvement, with only 4 percent identifying this area. In light of the concerns over funding that will be documented later, it is gratifying to note that just over 3 in every 10 (31 percent) of those who listed an area of improvement mention resources, supports, and physical accessibility as one of the most significant areas of improvement. These of course require financing. We turn our attention now to how the different constituencies view the areas of significant improvement (see Table 6).

1. Given this low number, it would not be informative to include this area in the finer breakdowns by constituency, and therefore this area will not be considered further.

Identification and Assessment

Of note is that constituents most heavily involved in identification and assessment of special needs students (classroom teacher, resource/learning centre teacher, and education professional) are also most likely to state that this is the area of greatest improvement. About a third of these constituents identified this as an area of significant improvement.

Participants in the focus groups mentioned numerous specific improvements in the identification and assessment process. There was substantial agreement on the following improvements:

- access to better information for students with high and/or multiple needs; also access to competent personnel for referrals and assessments
- the Observation Survey in Literacy Achievement, which is helping to more clearly identify literacy needs, and the APSEA model of assessment, which is working well
- identification of both the strengths and needs of student, with a concomitant appreciation of the diversity of their strengths and needs
- involvement with parents in the assessment process; the communication logs between home and school are providing current and practical information on progress in certain sites
- interagency collaboration with community resources, such as the IWK and the Department of Health
- earlier, more consistent, and more formal intervention screening and assessments, which has resulted in better preschool-to-school transitions
- sharing of information and reports and improved access among the different stakeholders involved in special education (For example, some schools are doing a good job of forwarding and sharing information at times of transition. In these schools the tracking of students has improved. In some reports clearer language is being used.)

Program Planning Process

The principal or vice-principal, teachers involved, and parents are core team members in the special education program planning process at the school level. Although there is no one-to-one correspondence between these positions and the survey constituency terminology, it appears that the core members have different views on whether significant improvements have occurred in the program planning process. Only 26 percent of parents of children with special education needs note significant improvements in this area. This is in contrast to 54 percent of school administrators (principals and vice-principals) and 51 percent of resource/learning centre teachers who note improvements in the program planning process. Classroom teachers fell in between these two groupings, with 33 percent noting significant improvements.

In the focus groups, many of the same factors that were mentioned as having improved identification and assessment were also singled out as having improved the program planning process. For example, general agreement was expressed that both parents and students are now more involved in program planning. Guidance personnel involve them in

planning and teachers share information with them on curriculum outcomes. Parents note improved access to school psychologists and assessment information from multiple sources, including community agencies. This permits them to play a greater role in the planning process. Similarly, it was felt that there was greater collaboration and shared responsibility generated through the team planning approach. In some schools a team effort produces a partnership that collaboratively identifies appropriate strategies for students' success. Access to the program planning team provides greater feeling of support for classroom teachers. With the team approach, teacher assistants note that communication with teachers is working well, especially with teachers who have a positive attitude towards students with special needs.

A key factor in improved program planning is professional development. Professional development on strategies, learning styles, and program planning enables teachers to better use a variety of strategies. Teacher assistants cite professional development as clarifying their roles and assignments and in helping them gain specific necessary skills such as CPR. The professional development provided by the Department of Education has helped schools become more independent and less reliant on outside help.

IPPs are generally acknowledged as useful and necessary. Teachers state that the template for program planning and writing IPPs from a student outcomes basis has improved. Where IPPs are being documented, assessment reports are made available to parents, and the outcomes for students are clarified, monitored, and implemented, it works well. Teacher assistants appreciate having access to IPP information and the opportunity to provide feedback and support to program planning. There is agreement that IPPs help ensure that transition planning occurs.

Schools obviously differ in the effectiveness of the planning process. When program planning is part of the school culture and is implemented appropriately, it works very well. Special education professionals note that this is particularly so with respect to gifted students. The leadership of principals, administrators, and teachers was thought to be integral to improved planning. The team structure, for example, is particularly strong when the leadership of the school principal supports it. For some schools, strong administration leadership is acknowledged. Having administrators with resource backgrounds seems to be an advantage in this respect. Where schools have introduced procedural guidelines, this has increased the clarity for all involved. Teachers welcome the use of extended contact time, when it was made available, for program planning meetings and scheduled time for planning in high schools. From the student perspective, scheduled support time avoids disrupting class time.

Some initiatives, such as the Junior High Network, were cited as having a positive impact on program planning. Improvements in record keeping and documentation, individualized plans that include goals and outcomes, and increased levels of teacher and parental involvement were noted.

Table 6
Areas of Significant Improvements, by Primary Constituency

Primary Constituency (Areas of most significant improvement ▷)	% Identification & assessment	% Program planning process	% Parental involvement	% Programming standards and accountability	% Resources, supports, physical accessibility	% Funding	% Inclusive schooling
Parent/guardian	13	24	19	13	43	7	34
Parent/guardian of a student with special needs	21	26	24	12	37	2	
Classroom teacher	33	33	20	9	31	3	30
Resource/learning centre teacher	33	51	31	20	24	5	34
Teacher assistant	25	30	16	11	39	8	41
School administrator	17	54	37	10	24	3	42
Other education professional	29	40	30	17	27	4	26
Concerned citizen of NS	21	36	17	26	29	5	50

Note: The percentages are based on the number of respondents whose primary affiliation was known and who mentioned at least one area of significant improvement (N = 977).

Programming Standards and Accountability

Only a small proportion of the written submissions identified improvements in standards and accountability (see Table 6). There is little variation between constituencies with respect to identifying programming standards and accountability as an area of significant improvement. Noteworthy is that concerned citizens of Nova Scotia are the most likely to identify this as the most improved area.

Where improvements are noted, these are thought to be due to

- the provincial special education policy, which guides the interdependent collaboration of all partners in focussing on the student (The existence of the Special Education Policy, guided by Education Act, outlines consistent standards and increased communication and is the greatest factor in accountability.)
- the policy mandate that requires written documentation of students' IPPs and outlines parental involvement
- use of provincial outcomes to write IPPs
- better documentation of early intervention
- mandated systems reviews
- Reading Recovery™
- Teacher Assistant Guidelines
- the series of guides, guidelines, manuals, and curriculum outcomes
- the support of resource teachers at the school level
- teaming that focusses on student learning and program delivery

- inclusive practices in advocacy for students with special needs
- increased parental involvement and communication with parents, facilitated by the written logs, regular telephone calls, and parent-teacher conferences
- communication with support professionals such as SLP and psychologists
- regular feedback regarding performance from classroom teacher to teacher assistants
- job descriptions and clarity about roles and responsibilities
- timetables regarding teacher assistant support, and annual supervision for teacher assistants
- the involvement of teachers in developing curriculum outcomes/guides
- tracking progress using SLD, provincial student services statistics, and board action plans
- funding for policy implementation based on plans submitted by boards
- support from Department of Education (e.g., consultants) to work with boards
- provincial meetings with Student Services Co-ordinators and their counterparts (Department of Education/Boards)
- joint planning between program and student services co-ordinators (This has been affected, however, by administration cuts at board levels.)

Resources, Supports, and Physical Accessibility

As Table 6 shows, parents, both those with special education children and those without, are particularly likely to notice improved resources, supports, and physical accessibility; the same is true for teacher assistants. General agreement exists that a well-functioning resource is the professional development/inservice on policy implementation. Inservice training for teacher assistants, particularly school-based inservices, and especially for specific skills such as catheterization, first aid, and Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), is a valuable resource and support. They report that the funding they receive for inservice training is appropriate, and they welcome the opportunity to visit other schools to share information about similar situations.

A second valuable resource is a variety of formal programs. These include the Early Literacy/Reading Recovery™ program interventions, programming for students with severe learning disabilities (SLD), and APSEA services. Over time, expertise is being developed in specific areas (e.g., SLD, autism). The support and expertise provided by the Department of Education are also appreciated.

The student perspective is of course especially important on this topic. Students state that resource and learning centre teacher support for students, access to computers, and assistive/adaptive technology are working well. They find teacher assistant support and visiting university students helpful, and it works well for them when teachers offer assistance or ask if students need help. Mediation programs, photocopies of notes, use of manipulative materials in math, use of videos and various technologies to enhance learning computer programs, quiet rooms for writing tests, and FM systems for hearing-impaired students also help. Students believe that teachers learn more about students through extracurricular programs, and they appreciate it when teachers are available for help outside classroom time. It works well for students when teachers try to make students feel comfortable and have helpful strategies, and when teachers try to get to know students' strengths and needs early in the year. Some teachers review tests and provide constructive criticism in ways that help students learn from their mistakes.

Students note the following resources and supports as improving the implementation of program planning:

- provision of 'in class' support by resource teachers
- optional methods of assessment, such as oral tests
- more choice of programs and courses
- learning strategies courses
- use of 'exploratories' to vary the learning experiences
- teachers available for extra help
- progress reports every six weeks
- teachers' making adaptations to teaching strategies

Funding

As mentioned earlier, very few submissions mention funding as the area of greatest improvement. Parents/guardians of students with special needs are the least likely to identify funding as an area of greatest improvement, followed by school administrators and classroom teachers (see Table 6). These are among the constituents most likely to directly experience the effects of limited funding.

In the focus groups, teachers and school administrators agree that some aspects of funding, particularly supports such as teacher assistants, work well. Teachers believe that where school-based funding is available, it works well. They also appreciate that the Department of Education acknowledges the need for increased funding.

The fact that the framework for special education grants is included in the policy, and that funding for professional development is part of the Special Education Policy implementation, is acknowledged to be advantageous. It means that more students with severe learning disabilities are being served through funding provided to boards; that there is funding for Reading Recovery™; and that there is some interagency funding to support staff positions associated with special projects. The addition of three program directors to the Funding Education Committee is welcomed.

African Nova Scotians believe that students with physical disabilities are well served under current funding formula, and some additional services are being provided.

Parental Involvement

Although the focus group facilitators did not address parental involvement as a specific topic, it was nevertheless commented on in many of the focus groups. Whenever it was mentioned, the perception from all of the constituencies was that parental involvement has increased.

Of course, parents themselves are the most valid reporters of their involvement. And it is especially important to obtain the viewpoints of the parents/guardians of a student with special needs. Parents are not particularly likely to mention parental involvement as the area of most significant improvement, although about one-quarter of the parents of special needs students do so (see Table 6). Rather, they are about average in this respect, with school administrators most likely to see an improvement here.

It is gratifying to note that students believe that communication between parents, schools, and students, particularly through report cards and telephone calls at the elementary school level, works well to ensure standards and accountability. In high schools students assume more personal responsibility, and when teachers speak directly to students regarding their progress, it is helpful. Students believe parents are welcome to go into the school at anytime to conference with teachers. When teachers call home or send notes home, especially if they communicate as soon as the student is having difficulties, and when resource teachers are involved in communication with parents, it helps ensure standards. Having extra progress reports for some students between regular reporting times, student agenda books, and having teachers review test results with students and parents sign tests to confirm they have seen them work well. Methods of intervention such as Systems Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) support students with behavioural difficulties.

Significant Difficulties

Almost all respondents (1,267 out of 1,308, or 97 percent) identify significant difficulties in response to the question "What would you describe as the most significant difficulties in supporting children and youth with special needs in schools today?" Note that substantially more respondents identify significant difficulties than significant improvements. Returning to the question of why 25 percent of the submissions did not identify any improvements, this pattern suggests that it may indeed have been because many of them did not think there was sufficient improvement in any of the areas.[1]

Table 7 paints a dramatic picture of what the respondents identify as the greatest challenges: resources, supports, physical accessibility, and the funding for these. Four-fifths of the respondents identify resources, supports, and physical accessibility issues, and over a third (36 percent) list funding. Three in every 10 also mention that the program planning process could be improved significantly. Parental involvement is the area least often seen as needing to be improved, and only 1 in 10 respondents feels that identification and assessment is an area of significant difficulty. Programming standards and accountability were also not often identified as problematic.

Table 7
Areas of Significant Difficulties

	%	N
Identification & assessment	10	132
Program planning process	30	375
Parental involvement	5	69
Programming standards and accountability	14	181
Resources, supports, physical accessibility	80	1013
Funding	36	454
Inclusive schooling	19	243

Note: N refers to the number of cases in which this area was mentioned as one of significant difficulties. The same is true for the percentages. The percentages do not add to 100 since some respondents named more than one area of most significant difficulties.

1. An alternative interpretation for this pattern is that these 25 percent of respondents know what the current difficulties are, but have not been involved long enough to know what the situation was prior to 1996.

Extent of Constituency Consensus on Significant Difficulties

Do the various constituencies agree on the areas of significant difficulties? Information relevant to this question is given in Table 8.

Table 8
Areas of Most Significant Difficulties by Primary Constituency

Primary Constituency (Areas of most significant difficulties →)	% Identification & assessment	% Program planning process	% Parental involvement	% Programming standards and accountability	% Resources, supports, physical accessibility	% Funding	% Inclusive schooling
Parent/guardian	7	18	6	13	72	32	14
Parent/guardian of a student with special needs	17	30	10	25	69	39	23
Classroom teacher	9	35	4	12	83	27	20
Resource/learning centre teacher	11	31	3	13	84	42	20
Teacher assistant	11	17	5	10	77	44	14
School administrator	7	31	3	10	89	40	19
Other education professional	10	27	4	22	81	44	16
Concerned citizen of NS	18	33	20	16	76	45	29

Note: The percentages are based on the number of respondents whose primary affiliation was known and who mentioned at least one area of significant difficulty (N = 1250).

Substantial agreement exists among the various constituencies about the areas of greatest challenge, with few noteworthy differences. Parents/guardians of a student with special needs are more likely than most other constituents to feel that identification and assessment, parental involvement, programming standards and accountability, and inclusive schooling are areas of most significant difficulties. There is a broad concensus among constituent groups, ranging from 7 out of 10, to 9 out of 10, who identified resources, supports, and physical accessability as posing one of the most significant challenges. Parents/guardians are also as likely as most others to feel that funding is a significant challenge.

Suggestions for Improvement

Having identified the areas of significant difficulties, respondents were asked what suggestions they would make to improve programming and services for children and youth with special needs in schools. Virtually all submissions contain one or more suggestions. The suggestions made are summarized below, by policy area:

Identification and Assessment

In the written submission two suggestions were made to improve the identification and assessment process: improved and timely access to qualified professionals (58 submissions) and professional development for teachers on identification issues (30 submissions).

The focus groups provided elaboration on these two themes and added a number of others. There is support in all constituencies for earlier identification and assessment. Some believe that Early Identification and Intervention Services (EIIS) could be used to strengthen pre-school support for children with special needs and to facilitate smoother transition into the school system. In any event, it is clear that the waiting period for assessments is unsatisfactory. There simply seems to be inadequate time, and insufficient access to qualified professionals, to identify and discuss the strengths and needs of students. The feeling is that perhaps additional personnel could be hired to conduct assessments.

With respect to professional development, there is a need for a focus on improved communication, teamwork, and common understandings across agencies. Professional development, especially for teachers and principals, is needed on assessment policies and procedures. A review of issues of access to, and use of, appropriate assessment instruments appears to be desirable. Both the NSSBA and other educational professionals feel that the identification and assessment of students who are gifted needs to be addressed. Parents, on the other hand, are more concerned about the teachers' level of knowledge and understanding regarding such disabilities as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), LD, and autism and the potential difficulties in labeling students. It was also commonly felt that there is a substantial need for greater emphasis on special education identification and assessment in pre-service training.

Some concern was expressed that recommendations, especially by hospital staff and private practitioners, are based on a medical model and sometimes refer to outdated materials. This demonstrates, it was felt, a lack of familiarity with the school setting. Parents and other education professionals agree that assessments should be conducted across multiple settings and in environments familiar to the child.

Insufficient communication and information sharing is a further obstacle to effective identification and assessment. Practical information on student strengths and needs that teacher assistants and parents might have is not always valued. Pertinent information—such as medical, behavioural, and student outcomes—is not always readily available. Perhaps a protocol

could be put in place for reciprocal release of information.
This lack of information sharing is particularly problematic during transition times (e.g., grade-to-grade, school-to-school). Information that is shared is sometimes filled with education jargon, suggesting that a review of current brochures for appropriate language might be timely. There apparently is also an inconsistent use of terminology.

Program Planning Process

Several suggestions were made that respondents felt would improve the program planning process. Especially important would be to provide more time for program planning (104 submissions) and to increase professional development (89 submissions). Ten submissions noted that valuing parental input would improve the program planning process. A handful (five submissions) noted that there were difficulties developing and putting IPPs into practice, but no specific suggestions were made in that regard.
In the focus groups, a variety of suggestions were made with respect to time management. These include

- time for program planning should be scheduled into the regular school day
- meeting days where substitute teachers are provided should be allocated
- adequate staffing (minimum of 50 percent FTE) for resource teacher allocation
- a number of days scheduled early in the year should be allocated to IPP planning and floating substitute teachers could be used to free teachers
- early dismissals and access to a bank of days.

The feasibility of these procedures needs to be assessed.

Most groups agree that there is a need for more expertise and specialists at planning meetings and that professional development for administrators, teachers, and teacher assistants needs improvement. There is a perceived need for greater availability of trained staff for planning programs. It was suggested that opportunities should be provided for parents to participate actively in professional development initiatives. Again, there is an expressed need for all teachers to have special education component as part of pre-service training, and that professional development on behavioural issues is needed. New teachers are not always comfortable or familiar with program planning for students with special needs and pre-service training and continuing education being provided by university faculties of education needs improvement. It was suggested that regional boards initiate dialogues with university faculties of education, and partnerships with these faculties be developed, or existing partnerships improved, to ensure clear understanding regarding program planning policies. University faculty could be involved in, and perhaps should be expected to attend, professional development initiatives offered by the Department of Education. Certification for upgrading teachers (licence) should include a strong connection between coursework and classroom practice. It was

recommended that provincial guidelines for training and qualification for teacher assistants, particularly in the area of providing personal/physical care, be established. Time lines should be developed (e.g., five years) for upgrading, summer courses and workshops should be offered, and certification should be made available.

Teachers want increased professional development to help them better understand concepts and terminology (e.g., adaptations, IPPs, modifications), and others agree that there is a need for clarification of terminology for everyone involved. Perhaps access to professional reviews, journals, and articles could be provided. Administrators suggest that the Department of Education should provide summer institutes, meetings, and training workshops.

Transition planning is an area that needs attention. The writing of IPPs, planning from outcomes, and the transition component of IPPs, especially in year-to-year transitions, and follow-up need improvement. Changes/turnover in staff can lead to difficulties in transitions (e.g., term teachers). It was suggested that transition meetings should be held in the spring to plan for the coming year.

There is some concern about the role and appropriate qualifications of various personnel. Concerns expressed include

- the role of teacher assistants in program planning
- the hiring of unqualified resource teachers
- the desirability of additional certification requirements for specialist teachers (It was suggested that an agreement be sought between NSTU and Department of Education regarding competencies required for specialist positions—e.g., resource.)
- the practice of fragmenting resource positions to "top off" teacher assignment schedules, especially at senior high schools.

Leadership is an issue that a number of groups state needs improvement. Teachers state that the lack of high school administrative support should be addressed; parents state that principal leadership and accountability at the school level needs improvement; and NSSBA participants believe that the leadership provided by school administrators is not always as strong as it should be and state that boards must articulate the need for flexibility in assigning staff to ensure students' needs are met.

There is a further concern that IPPs, contrary to stated policy, are often not a team effort, but solely the responsibility of resource teachers. In this respect it is desired that more qualified personnel, such as teachers, principals, and student services administrators, be involved in developing and implementing program planning. To improve writing and implementing of IPPs, the role of team members should be clarified. Of course, to make a team approach work requires greater communication among the various constituencies, and the lack of such communication is frequently mentioned as a barrier to effective program planning.

There is a strong desire for consistency in the process of teaming and program planning across school boards, schools, and levels. Parents want consistency in implementing program plans, especially school to school, and board to board, and want this ensured at the school level. One suggestion is that successful program planning teams could be used as models. For example, the visiting of schools where program planning is being successfully done could be encouraged. Another suggestion is to create an IPP template to document student information.

Steps to ensure that individual student's needs are considered in the program planning process are thought to be necessary. At the junior and senior high school levels, there could be greater student involvement in planning their own IPPs. Students state that they welcome more opportunities to participate in 'exploratories' to help them identify their interests and strengths and want opportunities for some self-assessment and course development and selection.

Students want more annual and long-term learning outcomes explained to them and want specific and immediate feedback from teachers on tests and assignments, and more student/teacher conferencing that would help them improve and progress. They believe there should be more discussion with them regarding outcomes and expectations, and how and where support services will be provided to them. They want more emphasis on study skills and activities, the use of practical examples when a topic is introduced, and less notetaking. They suggest that an increase in peer helper programs and support staff would benefit them, and continued additional support for students with severe learning disabilities. Special education materials need to be more challenging and interesting. Students also want follow-up and implementation of program plans.

Parents want to see improved connection between assessment and programming and better use of assessment information in the program planning process. To do this, they suggest

- timely development and updating of program plans
- development of programming for specific types of needs (e.g., behaviour, learning disabilities, autism, ADD)
- an understanding of IPP's as dynamic working documents
- implementation of programming developed by specialists
- an improved process for evaluating student progress
- ongoing review as part of program planning process
- adaptations not viewed as "watering down" of curriculum
- assurances from schools that parents can bring parent advocates to program planning meetings and that they will be made welcome
- funding for resources to ensure implementation and
- reduction in class size

Parental Involvement

As emphasized in the policy report, parents must be made to feel an integral part of the special education process. There is consistent evidence that parents need to be drawn more into the decision-making process (50 submissions) and that more and better communications with parents are required (36 submissions). Only one submission thought the onus should be on parents to initiate assessment and program planning.

Participants in the focus groups generally believe inclusion is a co-operative venture, and when parents are involved, they are helpful. For this reason, more meaningful parental involvement should be encouraged, especially at the identification, assessment, and program planning stage. Teachers and other education professionals also state there is also a need for better communication with parents about assessment results and information. To facilitate this, the use of jargon should be reduced, the language in the reports should be more readable, and parents should be invited to take part in professional development workshops. Improved clarity is desired in reporting student progress to parents and informing parents regarding the need for individualized program planning and the implications of placing a student on an IPP.

There is an awareness of the need for assistance for parents who are not comfortable, especially in the program planning process. The initial contact with parents should be positive, and a means for ensuring that parents are engaged in the planning process should be established. They want parents made more welcome, more parental input, more valuing of their input, and increased awareness and information for parents regarding the program planning process. Although some state that parent involvement is working well, most agree that parent involvement needs improvement.

Many stakeholders, including parents themselves, believe there should be more honesty with parents on the part of all involved regarding the severity of abilities and disabilities and the students' needs. Parents would like less delay in informing parents of possible learning difficulties. Parents also want more onus on team members other than parents to initiate the assessment process, more suggestions about ways they can support their children at home, and to have their input valued.

Programming Standards and Accountability

Five main suggestions were made to improve programming standards and accountability. These, in order of relative frequency, are

- define and establish criteria for core special education services (59 submissions)
- clarify roles and responsibilities of school administrator (52 submissions)
- increase emphasis on special education for teachers (43 submissions)
- establish training/qualifications requirements for teacher assistants (43 submissions)
- mandate a system for monitoring and evaluating student progress (21 submissions)

In the focus groups, the dominant view is that a lack of resources makes it impossible to meet appropriate programming standards and acceptable levels of accountability. Broad agreement exists that the standard of program planning and implementation process needs improvement. A critical element in this is further clarification of the roles and responsibilities of all partners in the program planning process, particularly teacher assistants, teachers, and both unqualified and qualified resource teachers. Such clarification would raise standards and accountability. It was felt that board-level job descriptions are required. To maintain a high standard, it was felt important that teacher assistants not do the job of teachers, for example. Board-level job descriptions should also result in more consistency across schools in the implementation of the policies and the levels of accountability.

To improve school-level accountability, there also needs to be assessment and evaluation at the classroom level. It was felt that the evaluation of program outcomes needs improvement, and assurance is needed that they take place. This includes regular reviews of IPPs, with improved monitoring to ensure IPP implementation. The manner in which programming decisions are made, such as changing status from IPP to adaptations, needs to be clarified. Liability and accountability issues regarding signatures on IPPs need to be addressed.

Greater specificity in the writing and evaluation of IPPs was suggested, with a focus on specific curriculum outcomes instead of long-term outcomes.

Transition issues (school to school, grade to grade, school to community) are frequently raised in connection with programming standards and accountability. A specific concern is post–grade 12 transitions. Teachers ask, "Transition to what?," for example. Similarly there is a need for post-18-year programming for students with special needs, including practical life skills programming.

Resources, Supports, and Physical Accessibility

In light of how many respondents identified resources, supports, and physical accessibility as one of the most significant difficulties, it is not surprising that most of the suggestions concern this area. Again in order of relative frequency, the suggestions are

- increase the access to (or number of) qualified professional supports (445 submissions)
- increase the number of teacher assistants (359 submissions)
- provide a continuum of programming and services options (332 submissions)
- provide more time for specific professional training and development (211 submissions)
- improve access to and sharing of material resources and assistance (161 sub... sions)
- reduce class size (152 submissions)

- improve access to professionals and support in external agencies (37 submissions)
- improve physical accessibility/space (29 submissions)

Within the focus groups, a daunting list of specific required resources and supports was enumerated. The different stakeholders made many concrete and useful suggestions. These suggestions are of sufficient importance that they should be given in detail. They can be found in the appendix attached to this report.

Funding

Almost all, if not all, of the suggestions made with respect to resources, supports, and physical access require funding to implement. Hence, it is no surprise that respondents make primarily one suggestion about funding: increase it. Given the great variety of required resources and supports, it would not be of much value to list what the different stakeholders felt should be funded, since these essentially repeat the list of required resources and supports.[1]

The only other recommendation of note is that 30 respondents felt a long-term commitment is needed to address special education needs.

Inclusive Schools

"No one wants to go back. Inclusion is better." [Teachers' focus group]

A main thrust of the special education policy implemented in 1996 was its emphasis on inclusiveness. The questionnaire included the following statement: "The goal of inclusive schooling is to facilitate the membership, participation and learning of all students in public school programs and activities." Following this statement, respondents were asked to comment on the progress made towards achieving this goal, and to provide suggestions for making schools more inclusive. A total of 879 submissions made comments on the progress made that could be classified as no or poor progress, mixed progress, or good progress. Views regarding the amount of progress made on inclusiveness were rather mixed: about one-quarter felt it was poor, half thought it was mixed, and one quarter thought it was good. Perhaps the conclusion that can be drawn from this is that moderate progress has been made on inclusiveness, with significant room for improvement remaining.

Those who saw some progress were particularly likely to mention the increased acceptance of diversity (55 submissions) and a variety of positive benefits to the students (54 submissions). Also noted was the improved collaboration/team approach to implementing special education programs (23 submissions). Perhaps somewhat disappointing is that only 10 submissions noted that family/parental satisfaction had increased.

1. The appendix provides this information separately for the different stakeholders.

A large proportion of respondents made suggestions for making schools more inclusive. These include

- provide more resources/funding (539 submissions)
- increase programming and services options (245 submissions)
- provide more professional development for educators (206 submissions)
- provide additional in-class support for teachers (192 submissions)
- increase inclusive school activities and learning experiences (126 submissions)
- enhance teacher skills in making adaptations (79 submissions)
- clarify/elaborate definition of inclusion (60 submissions)
- use peer support (35 submissions)
- improve pre-service education (11 submissions)

The views on inclusiveness did not differ much among the different constituencies (see Table 9). Among all constituencies except one, a somewhat greater proportion viewed progress on inclusive schooling as good rather than poor. The one exception is the classroom teacher. 3 in every 10 (31 percent) teachers felt progress on inclusive schooling was poor, compared to less than 2 in every 10 (18 percent) who considered it good. Of note is the fact that about a third of both categories of parents thought progress on inclusive schooling was good, although it should also be pointed out that one-fifth or more of parents felt progress was poor.

Table 9
Views on Progress Made on Inclusive Schooling, by Primary Constituency
Progress on inclusive schooling

Primary Constituency	Poor %	Mixed%	Good%	Total%
Parent/guardian	20	47	33	100
Parent/guardian of a student with special needs	24	43	32	100
Classroom teacher	31	51	18	100
Resource/learning centre teacher	21	54	25	100
Teacher assistant	24	47	29	100
School administrator	15	59	27	100
Other education professional	17	53	29	100
Concerned citizen of NS	15	52	33	100

Note: Percentages are based on the 866 submissions where the comments on inclusiveness could be classified.

In all focus groups there was agreement that a more consistent understanding of the concept of inclusive schooling is needed. Often current attitudes are based on misconceptions of what is meant by inclusive schooling. It was suggested that specific education and training on what inclusion means and what it involves should be provided for both teachers and parents, and more information should be made available to the general public. It was felt that cuts in resources undermine inclusion and that a reinstatement of previous support and expertise is warranted.

To effectively practise inclusion, teachers say they need more support from school administrators and more expertise at the board level. Teacher assistants suggest that inclusion will be more successful when all partners take ownership, including parents. Some feel this may require a support program for parents.

There was also a consensus that improvements in inclusion will require a wide range and continuum of programming for students with special needs. Many recommend more programming options at the junior and senior high school levels, including multi-age classrooms and learning centres; more comprehensive, as well as academic, programming; and more flexibility in high school credits. There is a clear need to address behavioural challenges.

One area identified as needing improvement, according to teachers and teacher assistants in the focus groups, is the understanding of some classroom teachers about the nature of inclusion. They state that some teachers' views about inclusion are based on misunderstandings. Both teachers and CSAP are concerned that students are taken out of class for resource, and in some cases this is detrimental to the sudents' progress.

The effects of inclusive schooling are of course greatest on the students themselves. For this reason, student views on inclusive schooling are of special significance. Students state that not all school activities are as inclusive as they should be, especially at the senior high school level. More options in extracurricular activities, such as sports activities that are not competitive, are needed so there will be more opportunities for participation by students with special needs. Student councils need to be more inclusive in their membership and in their activities and practices. Students feel that more emphasis on respect for others is needed in schools, and this must be reinforced through modelling by teachers. There is a tendency for students to form cliques, a problem for students who are not part of the "in crowd." Some students do not accept those with special needs, and teasing and bullying are not always addressed. Stereotyping of students occurs, and special classes are sometimes located in isolated areas of the school. For these reasons, they want more acceptance of diversity.

Recommendations

Inclusive Schooling

The Special Education Policy is embedded in a philosophy of inclusive schooling. However, the input received in the Special Education Implementation Review indicates that the term "inclusion" requires clarification as there is inconsistent understanding and interpretation of the concept. As stated in the policy, **"The goal of inclusive schooling is to facilitate the membership, participation and learning of all students in school programs and activities."** (p.33)

The challenge in implementing inclusive schooling is that it involves attitudes, values, and belief systems rather than a single defined set of outcomes expected for a particular group or groups of students. The emphasis of the policy is on quality programming for all students in the company of their peers. The classroom culture, including its composition and number of students, its atmosphere and learning environment, provides the context for optimum learning opportunities for all students. Guetzloe, notes, "inclusion should be defined as a philosophical position, attitude, and value statement rather than a point on the continuum of educational services. The philosophy of inclusion is an individual and collective commitment among all education professionals, families, and the community toward 'ownership' of all students with disabilities, those who are at risk of being so identified, and those without disabilities." (Guetzloe 1994)

The factors affecting implementation of inclusive schooling and the characteristics of inclusive schools outlined in Section 2 of the *Special Education Policy Manual* are as follows:

- a focus on outcomes is emphasized, establishing expectations that all student work toward in a variety of ways
- there is an emphasis on activity-based, small group work where students interact with each other
- classroom teaching and management strategies are flexible enough to provide for short-term interventions which may involve individual or small group work in other settings
- creative use is made of human resources to assist and support students (e.g., peer helping, tutoring and mentoring programs)
- school teams meet regularly and use a collaborative problem-solving approach to address the programming and support service needs of individual students
- parents/guardians are regularly involved in decisions about their children's educational program
- instructional leadership and support are provided by administrators and school-based student support staff to assist classroom teachers in developing appropriate programming for all students

- ongoing training and staff development are seen as a priority and are facilitated
- school boards provide a continuum of programming options and services to meet the special needs of students
- there are strong linkages between the school and outside agencies and a co-operative approach to support service delivery

To support implementation of the Special Education Policy, the SEIRC believes there is a need for more and better communication on the vision and contents of the Special Education Policy, particularly in relation to the meaning and scope of the principle of "inclusive schooling," the characteristics of inclusive schools, and the key components in the program planning process.

Recommendations

1. The Department of Education and school boards should develop a communication plan to improve understanding of inclusive schooling and programming and services for students with special needs. The communication plan will describe how to access existing documents and will support the development of a series of information brochures. The brochures should describe programming and services available and how they can be accessed. Brochures should cover, but not be limited to, the following:
   - inclusive schooling
   - identification and assessment
   - program planning process
   - appeal process
   - transitions

   Stakeholder groups should be consulted regarding the development of the plan and materials, and the documents should emphasize clear explanations using plain language.

2. The Department of Education and school boards should establish common terminology in special education (e.g., adaptations/modifications, EPA/SPA/TA, resource teachers/PST/LST, etc.). Further, the Department of Education should clarify the term "emotional impairment" in Policy 1.3.

Professional Development

A crucial factor identified as influencing the implementation of all areas of the Special Education Policy is training for those involved. There was strong and general agreement on the need for more professional development and training for administrators, teachers, and teacher assistants and for the provision of opportunities for parents to receive more and better information about special education programming and services.

Recommendations

3. The Department of Education, university faculties of education, school boards, and the Nova Scotia Teachers Union (NSTU) should collaborate on the development and implementation of an ongoing inservice plan for teachers, administrators, professional support staff, and teacher assistants on programming and services for students with special needs. The plan should encourage
   - involvement of teachers and teacher assistants in the design and development of inservice plans to address local needs
   - participation of school board members, parents, university education faculty, and professionals from outside education who work with children and youth with special needs.

   The plan should increase knowledge and understanding of specific disabilities and the link between assessment and instructional practices and should focus on a variety of teaching strategies, adaptations, learning styles, individual program planning, meaningful parental involvement, teacher-student communication, behavioural issues, and leadership.

   The Department of Education and school boards should provide sufficient additional funding and time for implementation of the plan and ensure systematic evaluation of outcomes.

4. The Department of Education and school boards should develop and implement information and training sessions for parents regarding the special education policy, programming and services for students with special needs, and issues surrounding specific disabilities.

5. The Department of Education, school boards, NSTU, and faculties of education should design and implement an annual institute to provide opportunities for education professionals to share and network effective/promising practices, materials, and resources. Involved in these sessions should be parents, advocacy groups, and other professionals to share their experiences.

Identification and Assessment

Identification and assessment was described by participants in the review as one of the areas related to special education programming and services that have improved. However, the Special Education Implementation Review Committee identified the need for further improvement in this area, particularly with regard to access to qualified professionals, early identification services, and professional development for teachers.

Recommendations

6. The Department of Education and school boards should review existing referral and assessment practices of school boards and develop uniform guidelines that
   - establish appropriate and timely referral and assessment practices
   - describe the ongoing link between assessment and instructional practices.

7. The Department of Education, university faculties of education, and school boards in consultation with teachers should collaborate to design, implement, and evaluate professional development opportunities for resource and classroom teachers, including institutes and courses on identification and assessment practices.

8. The Department of Education should set targets and provide financial support for appropriate numbers of qualified professionals in the school system to support the identification and assessment process. Geographic considerations should be incorporated into this process.

Program Planning

Program planning was identified as an area in which there has been improvement since the implementation of the Special Education Policy began. However, the lack of time to plan, implement, and review individual program plans was identified as a critical issue by teachers and administrators. There was also at times confusion over roles and responsibilities regarding program planning.

Recommendations

9. The Department of Education should establish a committee including the NSTU and school boards to review and recommend by November 1, 2001, ways to ensure that teachers have sufficient time available for program planning. The report of the committee should provide
   - options/effective practices to increase the time available to plan
   - clarification that 'contact time' includes time utilized for program planning
   - a communication/implementation plan

10. The Department of Education and school boards should develop and implement a guide for teachers, administrators, and professional support personnel, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of all involved in the program planning process.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement was frequently raised in the review process. While the general perception is that it has improved over the last several years, there are still issues, particularly regarding the value placed upon parental input in the program planning process.

Recommendations

11. The Department of Education, in consultation with the Special Education Programs and Services Committee (SEPS), should develop a guide for parents on the program planning process and the role of all partners in the process.

12. Each school board should develop and implement a strategy consistent with the guide to enhance meaningful parental involvement in the program planning process.

Interagency Collaboration

Participants in the review process, both those from within the education system and parents, identified issues surrounding resources and supports from other service systems. Frustrations were evident regarding the difficulty in ensuring smooth transitions, both into school and from secondary education to what follows. The need for better access to health and community service supports while children and youth are in school was also evident in the responses.

Recommendations

13. Government, through the Child and Youth Action Committee (CAYAC), should ensure interagency collaboration to enhance access to programs and services for children and youth with special needs. The following actions should be undertaken:
    - Revise and expand the handbook *Transition Planning in Nova Scotia* (1994). Transition procedures at school entry and school leaving should be outlined.
    - Develop collaborative practices with health professionals to ensure that recommendations made to schools are feasible and practical and consider the context of the school environment.
    - Identify and address the gaps in support for children and youth with special needs. This should include implementation of the recommendations in the report "Mental Health: A Time for Action," Bland and Dufton, May 2000.
    - Develop a mechanism for the provision of services and funding to support youth with disabilities aged 18–21 years old upon school leaving.

Resources and Supports

Resources, supports, and funding are often linked. Better access to specific resources may require more funding; but ensuring that resources and supports are used for their allocated purpose is also critical. Many participants in the review emphasized that while access to more professional and qualified support is necessary, we must also make better use of what exists and ensure that appropriate plans are in place for establishing priorities for the use of allocated resources. The need for access to appropriate materials for students was raised. Parents, teachers and students noted that there is a need to develop programming and supports to address behavioural issues.

Recommendations

14. The Department of Education should define core services and desired service ratios (based on recognized professional standards) for professional staff at the school board and school levels.

15. The Department of Education should engage on a short-term contract a person with expertise and qualifications in the educational applications of assistive technology to design a framework for the acquisition, distribution, and provision of a full range of assistive technology devices and services for the P–12 school system.

16. The Department of Education and school boards should review and update the list of Authorized Learning Resources to facilitate access to appropriate multi-level resources for students and teachers in both English and French.

17. The Department of Education, in consultation with education partners, should develop programming guidelines and strategies to support students with behavioural challenges in the school system.

18. The Department of Education, through the Education Funding Committee, should address the issue of class size guidelines and related funding requirements.

Funding

The Interim Report identified the critical shortage of funding for special education as noted since 1996 by the Funding Review Work Group. This lack of resources is jeopardizing the implementation of the policy, which has an impact on all students, not just those with special needs. The Special Education Implementation Review Committee notes that government, in its budget for 2001–02, has identified an additional $3 million in special education funding for school boards. While this is a start to meet the recommendations of previous education funding reports, it is noted that the request was for $6 million additional per year for five years to meet the target of an additional $30 million beyond inflationary pressures. The following recommendations take into account the Minister's request to suggest how funding should be distributed to ensure students have the educational opportunities they need.

Recommendations

19. The Department of Education should provide an immediate injection of $20 million in the 2002–03 fiscal year targeted to a base level of core services and appropriate service ratios.

20. Core services caseloads should be reviewed annually by the Special Education Programs and Services Committee to recommend appropriate service and funding levels to the Minister.

21. The Department of Education should cost the recommendations in the SEIRC report and include them in the funding plan in time for the next budget cycle. The plan will identify how the additional funding should be targeted to address needs in the following priority areas:
    - professional development
    - support for emotionally/behaviourally challenged students based on:
      I. guidelines developed by the department in consultation with school boards, teachers, and parents and
      II. proposals submitted by school boards reflecting effective practices
    - learning resources for students with special needs including a designated amount to be accessed at the school level
    - assistive technology
    - teacher time for program planning and implementation

22. Additional funding should be included in the resource credit allocation for schools to reflect the need for additional learning resources for students with special needs.

Programming Standards and Accountability

The clarification of roles and responsibilities of all partners in the program planning process was seen as necessary in order to address standards and to hold those involved accountable for the outcomes. This includes the roles of parents and students who play a key collaborative role in the education process as identified in the Education Act. The recommendations under Program Planning include the delineation of roles and responsibilities. The need for appropriate pre-service education and professional development were also noted in relation to standards. With regard to system accountability, tracking and monitoring of expenditures, provision of resources, and monitoring student progress were seen as critical. It should be noted that participants in the review frequently linked standards and accountability with the lack of resources available. Indeed, as Thiessen noted: "In the focus groups, the dominant view is that a lack of resources makes it impossible to meet appropriate programming standards and acceptable levels of accountability."

Recommendations

23. School boards should monitor individual program plans (IPPs) to ensure that the outcomes developed and implemented are appropriate and measurable. In addition, a consistent system should be developed to track, monitor, and report to parents student progress and achievement on outcomes stated in IPPs.

24. As recommended in the *Post-Shapiro Review of Teacher Education in Nova Scotia, Oct 2000*, the Minister should ensure there is a mechanism to monitor pre-service teacher education programs and propose policy changes. All teachers who successfully complete an approved program of initial teacher education and are certified to teach in Nova Scotia should have undertaken coursework that addresses programming in special education and practica within inclusive settings that involves working with a diverse range of students who have special education needs.

25. Notwithstanding contractual agreements, the Department of Education should define or adopt, and school boards should adhere to, competencies and/or professional qualifications in hiring or assigning persons responsible for providing core special education services (e.g., resource teachers, speech language pathologists, school psychologists, student service coordinators).

26. School boards should ensure that each school implements "Tracking Our Progress" as part of their school improvement planning. School boards should submit an annual report on implementation to the Department of Education, which in turn will be shared with SEPS.

27. School boards should monitor resource teacher allocations in schools to ensure appropriate utilization of allocated staff and effective implementation of resource programs and services.

28. The Department of Education, in consultation with school boards, should identify core competencies for teacher assistants to be included in training programs for teacher assistants. These competencies should be required components in approved training programs.

29. School boards should develop short- and long-term plans for the provision of barrier-free access to, and within, educational facilities as mandated under Section 64(2)(e) of the Education Act and include updates on implementation of their plans as part of their annual report to the Minister of Education. The Department of Education should provide an annual update to be tabled each fall at a SEPS meeting regarding progress in both existing and new facilities in improving barrier-free access to public schools.

30. The department should table an annual report with SEPS on progress in implementing the special education policy and the recommendations in this report and on the resources provided to school boards and schools to assist in implementation.

31. The Department of Education, in consultation with the current SEPS committee, should review the role, mandate, and membership of the SEPS in light of the additional responsibilities recommended by this report.

Appeal Process

While the appeal process received little comment through the survey and focus group process, it was discussed a number of times by the Special Education Implementation Review Committee. Issues surfaced regarding the information that is provided to parents and teachers about the process and the need to ensure that disputes surrounding IPPs can be resolved in a way that minimizes the need for formal appeals.

Recommendations

32. The Department of Education, in collaboration with school boards, should provide professional development for board office and school administrators and student services personnel in mediation skills to increase their ability to ensure that disputes regarding IPPs are resolved in a manner that is timely and minimizes the necessity of using the formal appeal process.

33. The Department of Education, in collaboration with school boards, should adopt mandatory procedures for the school board level appeal process that ensure timely resolution, specific recommendations, and parent involvement in selection of the review panel (similar to those afforded in the provincial appeal process).

34. The Department of Education and school boards should develop an information package on the appeal process to be distributed to parents in situations where there is an unresolved dispute regarding IPP outcomes or placement. The package should include all relevant board and department information in a format that provides parents with clear directions throughout the appeal process.

Appendixes

Appendix 1

Special Education Implementation Review: Analysis of Written Submission and Focus Groups

Procedures Used to Obtain Written Submissions and to Conduct Focus Groups

Written Submissions

A total of 1,308 written submissions were received in response to the advertised requests for submission. Clearly these are not a random sample of any defined population; hence tests of statistical significance are inappropriate and will not be reported. Rather, they are best understood as responses from a variety of constituents who are interested in the nature of the special education policies and their implementation in Nova Scotia. This is corroborated by the fact that virtually all (94 percent) were aware that the Nova Scotia Department of Education had a special education policy in effect prior to receiving the information package that was part of the survey. Three out of every five respondents had children of their own in the Nova Scotia public school system; this perhaps increased their interest in the nature and functioning of the special education policies, particularly the emphasis on inclusiveness.

Submissions were received from every region of the province (see Table 1). The distribution of submissions by school board is remarkably similar (within 3 percent for all school boards) to the relative size of the student bodies being served by these school boards. In this respect, the submissions can be considered a representative sample.

Table 1
Distribution of Submissions and Enrolments by School Board

Which school board serves you?	%	N	Students served (1998–99) %
Annapolis Valley Regional School Board	14	175	11
Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board	15	191	14
Chignecto Central Regional School Board	17	213	17
Conseil scolaire acadien provincial	2	21	3
Halifax Regional School Board	34	432	36
Southwest Regional School Board	12	145	12
Strait Regional School Board	6	81	7
Total	100	1,258	100

Note: Information on school board was not ascertained in 50 submissions. Information on student enrolments are from Nova Scotia Department of Education, *Statistical Summary 1998–99*.

Respondents' views concerning significant improvements and difficulties in supporting children and youth with special needs, as well as their suggestions for improving the supports were stated in their own words. Staff members from the Nova Scotia Department of Education coded these into relevant categories, to be described later. The coders read through about 25 of the submissions, created some tentative code definitions on the basis of these, discussed the emerging code definitions among themselves, and then proceeded to code the open-ended responses. Some of the responses were "double coded" to check on the reliability of the coding process. Although no exact tally was made, it appeared that there was approximately 70 percent agreement among the coders. This is generally considered to be at the low, but still acceptable, end of inter-rater reliability. A commerce co-op student entered the resulting data into numeric data files. The quality of the data entry was extremely high, judged on the basis of the low number of instances in which inadmissible (out of range) numbers were found in the data set.

Constituencies

Those who made submissions were asked to indicate in what capacities (such as teacher, parent of a special education child, administrator) they were making their submissions. One main purpose of this review is to assess the extent and nature of different priorities and concerns that may exist between the different constituencies. That is, parents may have quite different points of view from special education teachers, for example, on what works well and what needs improvement. A problem in this respect is that many respondents indicated two or more capacities, raising the issue of how to best classify which constituency they "really" represent. There is no single answer to this, and therefore all analyses were run using three different definitions—which were labelled inclusive constituency, sole constituency, and primary constituency.

Analyses based on inclusive constituency include all those who listed a given constituency, regardless of which other constituencies they also listed. This is the broadest definition of constituency and is, therefore, also the least "pure" definition. Analyses based on sole constituency are limited to those submissions in which respondents listed only a single constituency; an analysis based on this definition is the purest one, but since so many respondents listed more than one constituency, it also reduces substantially the number of cases, increasing the sampling fluctuations. As Table 2 shows, only about half the submissions (N=633) were made by respondents representing only a single constituency. The primary constituency is a compromise definition that assumes some self-definitions take precedence over others. The following hierarchy was used to determine the primary constituency:

- school administrator
- other education professional
- resource/learning centre teacher
- classroom teacher
- teacher assistant

- parent/guardian of a student with special needs
- parent/guardian
- student
- concerned citizen of NS
- other

This means that if a respondent checked "school administrator," then regardless of what else was checked, this was their primary constituency. If they indicated "other education professional" but did not check "school administrator," then regardless of what else was checked, their primary constituency was "other education professional." The same logic was applied for the remaining definitions of primary constituency. The advantage of this definition is that it uses all the submissions. The possible disadvantage is that it assumes, for example, that a classroom teacher who is also a parent/guardian is speaking primarily from the vantage point of a classroom teacher rather than a parent in their submission. Some respondents did not fit into any of the named constituencies. These 25 cases were combined with "concerned citizen of NS." Also, the number of submissions from solely or primarily students was too small (N = 4 and 5, respectively) to obtain any meaningful estimates. For this reason, they too are combined with the "concerned citizen" constituency. Hence this latter constituency should be thought of as a heterogeneous residual one that is defined as simply not belonging to any of the other constituencies. In the remainder of this report, any survey constituency figures cited were calculated on the primary constituency definition. All analyses were replicated using the inclusive and sole definitions as a check on the validity of conclusions being drawn.

Table 2
Distribution of Survey Constituency

	Constituency Definition					
	Inclusive		Sole		Primary	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Student	1	20	1	4	0	5
Parent/guardian	24	564	12	74	9	111
Parent/guardian of a student with special needs	10	249	9	59	13	168
Classroom teacher	23	541	42	267	35	454
Resource/learning centre teacher	9	207	13	83	14	182
Teacher assistant	6	141	8	48	11	136
School administrator	5	108	6	39	8	108
Other education professional	4	89	3	20	6	81
Concerned citizen of NS	20	468	6	39	3	44
Total	100	2387	100	633	100	1289

Focus Groups

A focus group process was initiated to explore issues in more depth. A total of 47 focus groups were held between October and December 2000 in a number of locations in Nova Scotia to collect information and receive input from the following special interest groups:

- Nova Scotia School Board Association (NSSBA) members
- school administrators
- student services co-ordinators (SSC)
- teachers
- teacher assistants
- students
- parents
- other professionals
- African Nova Scotians (ANS)
- Francophone Nova Scotians

Participants in the focus groups were selected with input from school boards, the unions involved, school councils, and home and school associations. Members of SEIRC participated as observers in focus group sessions with each of the groups identified in each of the school board regions.

Experienced facilitators were selected to conduct the sessions, and a facilitator's manual regarding the process was developed. Each group was provided with background information and led through key areas related to policy implementation. The process provided the opportunity for participants to comment on the following aspects of special education implementation and to identify what is working, what needs improvement, and what should be done:

- identification and assessment
- program planning
- resources and supports
- standards and accountability
- funding [students were not invited to discuss funding]
- inclusive schooling

The results of the focus groups, involving approximately 560 people, were analysed and synthesized.

Appendix 2

Focus Group Details

Significant Improvements

Identification and Assessment

School administrators, teachers, and CSAP in the focus groups agree that the established assessment process, particularly at the school level; pre-referral work prior to referral; and interagency collaboration have improved. CSAP also see earlier identification than in the past, and they believe assessment has become more formal and driven by policy and there is more consideration of the outcome's framework. ANS state that there is early and consistent assessment for some students, and they have observed improved teacher observation skills.

School administrators believe that the system responds well to requests for psycho-educational assessments; that consultation with psychologists, the Department of Health early intervention screening, and early identification of autism are working well; and that the ongoing review of IPPs supports the assessment process.

Teachers, CSAP, and some teacher assistants agree that there is more shared responsibility for assessments. They state that, in the area of identification and assessment, there is an improvement in

- access to better information for students with high/multiple needs
- information gained from Reading Recovery™ assessments
- communication and collaboration with regard to student strengths and needs
- communication with parents and teachers of assessment results
- availability of reports to teachers and administrators for transition purposes
- clear language in reports
- the number of transition meetings

In addition, CSAP see improvement regarding the diversity of students' needs in class. They also see improved opportunities for professional development on identification and assessment. The role and responsibilities of resource teachers as support have been reexamined; there are improved expectations regarding documentation; and the need for expertise and specialists such as speech and language pathologists, psychometricians, special education specialists, etc., is recognized.

NSSBA sees an improvement in

- the assessment of students with multiple disabilities and high needs
- the involvement of parents in the assessment process
- identification of student strengths and needs by teachers
- public awareness

- the assessment and identification process within boards
- collaboration with community resources, such as the IWK

Teacher assistants believe that the sharing of information with them is working well, particularly the sharing of important information about students' strengths and needs. Information sharing is conducted in program planning meetings, in meetings with guidance personnel who often co-ordinate information received from other agencies, and regular meetings of teachers and teacher assistants. They receive comprehensive information provided by APSEA and feel that some schools are doing a good job of forwarding and sharing information at times of transition. The communication logs between home and school are providing current and practical information on progress in certain sites.

'Other professionals' state that the special education policy is working well in relation to assessments, and when policies and procedures are followed the established process works well, and most referrals, especially those through program planning teams, are appropriate. Teacher identification of students and early intervention/transitions from pre-school to school are working well. They also believe that collaboration and outreach are working well. In one site, 'other professionals' state that the tracking of students is working well. In some sites, 'other professionals' believe that they have access to competent personnel for referrals and assessments, and good assessments are conducted by psychologists. In one site, 'other professionals' state they have access to assessments. 'Other professionals' also cite professional development and improved networks with mental health services as working well. 'Other professionals' in two sites state that assessments embedded in program planning process works well and Reading Recovery™ assessment information informs their programming. SSCs state that the process outlined in the Special Education Policy supports timely intervention for students and the understanding of what assessment is as a process is improving. The Reading Recovery™ Observation Survey is helping to more clearly identify literacy needs and the APSEA model of assessment is working well. There is co-operation and collaboration with hospitals and early intervention centres regarding children's transitions into school.

Parents state that the assessment and identification process has improved. Policies are in place, there is better communication with parents, and improved staff involvement and commitment. They also have improved access to school psychologists and assessment information from multiple sources, including community agencies. They believe they receive comprehensive assessment information from medical professionals, and identifications have improved. Parents also see earlier identification and assessment and improved identification of learning disabilities.
Students believe that teachers' understanding of their strengths and needs is working well and at the high school level is improving.

Program Planning

School administrators, teachers, teacher assistants, and CSAP in the focus groups state that collaboration and shared responsibility in team planning are working well in program planning. Teacher assistants state that this is particularly the case in elementary schools and believe the team structure is strong when it is supported by the leadership of the school principal. 'Other professionals' state that the program planning teams are critical to the development of IPPs, and parental involvement at this stage increases respect between parents and professionals. They also believe that inter-agency collaboration is working well. CSAP agree that program planning allows for the sharing of strategies in order to enhance transitional opportunities and allow for problem solving. They believe that it is resourceful to have input from parental expertise, and active parental involvement in the program planning process is working well. They see this as a team effort whereby the partnership collaboratively identifies appropriate strategies for students' success, and they appreciate the frankness that exists as to what practices are possible and reasonable. This process utilizes existing resources and strategies. SSC believe that access to the program planning team provides greater feeling of support for classroom teachers. Students state that they are more involved in program planning at the high school level and can provide their program planning team with additional information. Guidance personnel involve them in planning, and teachers share information with them on curriculum outcomes. NSSBA see improvement in inter-agency involvement and in the sharing of information in the program planning meetings. They believe the success of team planning is due to professional development.

Teachers state that professional development on strategies, learning styles, and program planning enables them to better use a variety of strategies. Teacher assistants also name professional development regarding their role and assignments, and in CPR training, as working well. Parents also believe professional development is working well. SSC believe that professional development provided by the Department of Education has helped schools become more independent and less reliant on outside help.

Administrators state that the leadership of administrators and teachers is integral to the process and believe this facilitates transitions. NSSBA has seen strong administration leadership in some schools and believe the process is supported by board staff who are able to assist with co-ordination (e.g., USF personnel in Strait). Parents also report they see examples of principal leadership and improved co-ordination by student services administrators. Teachers state that having administrators with resource backgrounds is an advantage.

'Other professionals' state that the program planning process is working well, and that transition planning is part of the process. Teachers believe that IPPs help to ensure that transition planning occurs, and parents state that the planning process assists with transition into school.

Teachers welcome the use of extended contact time for program planning meetings and scheduled time for planning in high schools. Some students see scheduled support time to avoid disrupting class time as working well.

In some sites, students feel that the implementation of program planning is working well. They think teachers are more aware of program planning and use their knowledge of learning styles in their teaching. Referral of students to resource, and the use of Multiple Intelligence surveys, is working well.

Teacher assistants state that communication between teachers and teacher assistants is working well, especially with teachers who have a positive attitude towards students with special needs. They believe they have access to IPP information, that their feedback and support are helpful to the ongoing program, and that they have opportunities to provide individual support and access to teacher assistant support. In some sites, support to teacher assistants provided by learning centre and resource teachers is working well. In two sites, teacher assistants report that there is good accountability for reviewing student progress.

Teachers also state that the template for program planning and writing IPPs from a student outcomes basis has improved.

NSSBA believe that initiatives such as the Junior High Network have had a positive impact on program planning, and see improvements in

- record keeping and documentation
- plans designed on individual basis
- plans that include goals and outcomes
- parental involvement, which ensures consistency and continuity for students
- level of teacher involvement

'Other professionals' state that when program planning is part of the school culture and is implemented appropriately, it works very well, especially for gifted students. They believe teachers are becoming more skilled at planning and are making connections between IPPs and PSP.

ANS state that the policy serves physically and mentally challenged students well, and that parent and teacher input in the process is working well. Program planning meetings are consistent in some schools, and adaptations and modifications are being done. IPPs are being documented, assessments reports are made available to parents, and the outcomes for students are clarified, monitored, and implemented. They also believe learning centres are providing support for students.

SSC state that the program planning process is going well and provides flexibility to schools and student services co-ordinators in terms of programming. The introduction of procedural guidelines provides clarity for all involved. Parental involvement in the program planning process is also working

well. The policy has benefited the whole system by increasing awareness regarding individualized programming for students and has helped children with special needs become more a part of their community. There is a greater willingness of other partner agencies to become involved.

Resource and Supports

School administrators state that professional development/inservice on policy implementation (i.e., Tatamagouche) is working well. They also believe that inservice training for teacher assistants, the use of volunteers to support students with high needs, and the Early Literacy/Reading Recovery™ program interventions are working well.

Teacher assistants agree that their inservice training, particularly school-based inservices, especially for specific skills such as catheterization, first aid, and ABA, is working well. Some teacher assistants report that the funding they receive for inservice training is working well. They welcome the opportunity to visit other schools to share information about similar situations, and they feel they have the support of school administrators. ANS state that the available resources are working well. NSSBA believe that Reading Recovery™ program and Teacher Assistant Guidelines are working well. Teacher assistants also believe that the Reading Recovery™ program works well. SSC state that mentoring and networking where it occurs amongst educators is working well, and these efforts are enhanced through use of technology. Access to expertise provided by APSEA; the focus on supporting and enhancing learning in the classroom; the expertise that is being developed in specific areas (e.g., SLD, autism); and ESL services where they exist are all working well. The support and expertise provided by Department of Education is also working well.

Parents, both those with special education children and those without, are particularly likely to notice improved resources, supports, and physical accessibility. Teacher assistants state that their access to resources such as libraries, computers in class, materials and resources provided by SLPs and psychologists, and access to guidance counselors in elementary schools is excellent/working well in some schools.

Teachers and CSAP state that when administrative leadership is supportive, implementation works well. Other resources and supports that teachers believe are working well or have improved are

- APSEA services
- learning strategies courses
- inter-agency collaboration
- community support
- SLD programming
- access to guides, manuals and computers,
- new buildings in P-3 schools
- materials to enhance literacy development
- specialist and teacher assistant support

CSAP report that access to the services of an occupational therapist for one student in the southwestern region is working well.
At one site, the teacher assistants report that their role/job descriptions are clear, and they have sufficient time for communication with the teacher.

'Other professionals' state that dedicated school personnel, such as specialist support, is working well. They also feel that teacher assistant support for children with physical care needs, and parent support are working well. In one site they see improvement in early literacy support and technology, and in another site, improved funding. Particularly at the elementary level, supports and resources are working well for students.

Students state that resource and learning centre teacher support for students, access to computers, and assistive/adaptive technology are working well. They find teacher assistant support and visiting university students helpful, and it works well for them when teachers offer assistance or ask if students need help. Teacher assistants suggest that students should be paired for peer help. Mediation programs, photocopies of notes, use of manipulative materials in math, use of videos and various technology to enhance learning computer programs, quiet rooms for writing tests, and FM systems for hearing impaired students also help.

Students state that the following resources and supports make the implementation of program planning successful:

- provision of 'in class' support by resource teachers
- optional methods of assessment, such as oral tests
- more choice of programs and courses
- learning strategies courses
- use of 'exploratories' to vary the learning experiences
- teachers available for extra help
- progress reports every six weeks
- teachers making adaptations to teaching strategies

Students believe teachers learn more about students through extracurricular programs, and they appreciate it when teachers are available for help outside classroom time. It works well for students when teachers try to make students feel comfortable and have helpful strategies, and when teachers try to get to know students' strengths and needs early in the year. Some teachers review tests and provide constructive criticism in ways that help students learn from their mistakes.

Parental Involvement

Focus groups were not asked to comment on parental involvement; however, some teachers, teacher assistants, and CSAP state that there has been improvement in parent involvement. A number of teacher assistants believe the communication log to parents is working well.

Standards and Accountability

School administrators in the focus groups state that it is the support of resource teachers at the school level that helps maintain standards and accountability, and the middle school concept for teaming enhances student learning and program delivery. They agree with teachers that documented IPPs also ensure that the system is accountable.

Teachers state that the following help to ensure accountability:

- use of provincial outcomes to write IPPs
- accountability of teachers through the program planning process
- systems reviews
- Reading Recovery™
- Teacher Assistant Guidelines
- better documentation of early intervention

CSAP believe that standards and accountability have improved for three reasons:

- inclusive practices in advocacy for students with special needs
- parental involvement
- the provincial special education policy, which guides the interdependent collaboration of all partners in focussing on the student

Teacher assistants state that communication with parents (through the logs), with support professionals such as SLP and psychologists, and regular feedback regarding performance from classroom teacher to teacher assistants ensure a high standard. They also state that job descriptions and clarity about their roles and responsibilities, timetables regarding their support, and annual supervision help ensure standards are reached. In the program planning process, some teacher assistants and 'other professionals' believe that the process mandated in the policy, collaboration of team members, and documentation of the plan, all work well to ensure accountability.

Students state that communication between parents, schools, and students, particularly through report cards and telephone calls at the elementary school level, is working well to ensure standards and accountability. In high schools students assume more personal responsibility, and when teachers speak directly to students regarding their progress, it is helpful. Students believe parents are welcome to go into the school at any time to conference with teachers. When teachers call home or send notes home, especially if they communicate as soon as the student is having difficulties, and when resource teachers are involved in communication with parents, it helps ensure standards. Having extra progress reports for some students between regular reporting times, student agenda books, and having teachers review test results with students and parents sign tests to confirm they have seen them work well. Students also believe methods of intervention such as STEP support students with behavioural difficulties.

'Other professionals' also state that the leadership of some school administrators, transition planning, inter-agency co-operation, policy mechanisms in which the Education Act legislation mandates process, and the fact that the process includes review mechanisms promote accountability. ANS believe the high standards and expectations for students in general, and for Black students in particular, and support provided by Black teachers who monitor the progress of Black students are working well.

SSC state that the existence of Special Education Policy, guided by Education Act, has established consistent standards and increased communication and is the greatest factor in accountability. The series of guides, guidelines, manuals, and curriculum outcomes are all excellent.

They also believe the following ensure high standards and accountability:

- involvement of teachers in developing curriculum outcomes/guides
- tracking progress using SLD, provincial student services statistics, and board action plans
- funding for policy implementation based on plans submitted by boards
- support from Department of Education (e.g., consultants) to work with boards
- provincial meeting with Student Services Co-ordinators and their counterparts (Department of Education/boards)
- joint planning between program and student services co-ordinators. (This has been impacted, however, by administration cuts at board levels.)

Parents believe that the policy and procedures are working well. The policy confirms that some students require individualized programming, and they applaud the fact that the team approach to program planning is mandated by policy. They also support that the policy requires written documentation of students' IPPs, IPP components are mandated, and parent involvement is outlined. Parents also believe that school level procedures for communication with parents (e.g., parent-teacher conferences, regular phone calls, communication logs) and communication between APSEA and parents are working well.

NSSBA do not cite any area of standards and accountability that is working well.

Funding

In the focus groups, teachers and school administrators agree that some aspects of funding, particularly supports such as teacher assistants, work well. Teachers believe that where school-based funding was available, it worked well. They also appreciated that the Department of Education acknowledges the need for increased funding.

'Other professionals' believe that the fact that the framework for special education grants is included in the policy and funding for professional development as part of the Special Education Policy implementation work

well. They state that more students with severe learning disabilities are being served through funding provided to boards; funding for Reading Recovery™ works well; and some inter-agency funding support for staff positions associated with special projects works well.

ANS believe students with physical disabilities are well served under the current funding formula and some additional services are being provided.

SSC support the protected and designated special education grant and state that annual funding set aside to support implementation of the policy increases the ability of boards to provide professional development. They welcome the addition of three program directors to the Funding Education Committee and believe that the tracking and reporting of SLD funding and costs is working well.

Neither parents nor CSAP mention any aspect of funding that is working well. NSSBA believe there has been improved access to text book allocation.

Inclusive Schooling

When asked to comment on what was working well on the topic of inclusive schooling, school administrators said that they endorsed the philosophy of inclusion, but that inclusive schooling works better for some students than others and works best if appropriate supports are in place. CSAP state that, morally and ethically, inclusion is the right thing to do and there is clear evidence that "no one wants to go back to segregated classrooms." Teachers agreed that the intent of inclusion is positive, and it is working well, particularly in elementary schools where there are small classes. Teacher assistants, students, and 'other professionals' agree that inclusive schooling is positive. Teacher assistants believe it benefits all students and teaches them to be accepting of difference and that care for others has changed attitudes. The social aspect and quality-of-life issues have been enhanced, and special needs students are provided access to all aspects of school life. It allows the school to include life skills in academic areas and other school experiences. Resource and learning centres help inclusion to work.

Students feel there has been more acceptance of diversity and more opportunities for students with special needs to participate in school activities. Inclusive schooling has shown that students can be in a regular class and still work at their own level, and with supports, such as SLD and techniques such as 'Circle of Friends', students in the regular classroom have the opportunity to show their strengths to their peers.

Students also feel that inclusive schooling has improved communication and collaboration with parents, and there is more communication between students and teachers about students' strengths and needs. They feel their opinions are valued more and cite their input in the Special Education Review as an example. Students commented that guidance staff are usually helpful in the process of inclusion, and some teachers are spending more time to get to know students' strengths and needs and make a special effort to make inclusion work.

'Other professionals' agree with teachers that at the elementary school level it works well. They state that inclusion offers students peers as models. The needs of individuals are considered, parents are more involved, learning centres are working well, teacher assistants support inclusion, and resource teachers provide consultation to classroom teachers. They also believe that inclusion promotes awareness of the need for transition planning.
NSSBA state that attitudes are changing, and students with special needs are viewed as having a right to be involved and have a productive life. They also believe that inclusive schooling has produced successful program planning teams.

Teachers, teacher assistants, and CSAP believe that, with better supports, the policy of inclusion could be very successful as

- all individuals are valued
- socialization opportunities are available to students
- students' self-esteem is increased
- fewer students are inappropriately placed
- more students feel they belong and stay in school
- teachers are encouraged to expand their teaching strategies and skills
- teachers are more accepting, more sensitive, and more empathetic

CSAP state that inclusion is most successful and appropriate attitudes prevail when classroom teachers adapt to the programming and the school administrator is supportive and accountable.

Teachers value the increased opportunities for students: in at least one community college site, an attempt has been made to set up programming for students with special needs; and would like more opportunities for sharing their 'success stories'. Teachers believe improved consideration of students' strengths and needs helps make inclusion successful.

Parents agree that inclusion benefits students as they learn from their peers and become more accepting of diversity. With inclusion, there are increased opportunities for learning experiences. The rights of students are affirmed, and students with special needs learn to be self-advocates, develop more friendships, and learn that they can experience success. Parents believe that inclusion is working particularly well for students with obvious special needs and elementary students. It could work well for senior high students when the process is collaborative and plans are well articulated.

Parents believe that some teachers and administrators are committed to making inclusive settings work and teachers are modeling inclusive practices for students. Inclusion works well when appropriate resources, such as APSEA, resource teachers, and trained teacher assistants in classrooms, are in place and there are adequate programming options for students. The Peaceful Schools Initiative supports inclusion. They believe there is parental support for inclusion and that parental support is necessary to make inclusion work.

ANS state that the policy helps to support inclusion, and when students with special needs are in regular classes and learning centres are open to all students (from remedial to enrichment), inclusion is successful.
SSC believe that in many schools there is evidence of "walls coming down." In these schools, teams are effective, teacher attitudes are positive, there is reduced segregation of students, and the children are happy. Inclusive practices include more focus on age-appropriate placement and resources, a collaborative approach to programming, and an emphasis on long-term planning. SSC see good progress in primary to grade 3, and believe that some senior high schools are beginning to receive professional development on inclusion through implementation funding.

Significant Difficulties

Identification and Assessment

School administrators, teachers, CSAP, 'other professionals', and parents in the focus groups all state that the waiting period for assessments is unsatisfactory. School administrators suggest that the waiting period for assessments would be reduced if additional personnel were hired to conduct them. Teacher assistants agree there is inadequate time for teachers and teacher assistants to discuss the strengths, needs, and progress of students.

Teachers, CSAP, and parents state that there is insufficient expertise available to conduct assessments, particularly full-time qualified resource teachers and professionals. NSSBA agree with teachers, CSAP, 'other professionals', and parents that more professional development training for classroom and resource teachers is needed in this area. SSC want improved collaboration on providing professional development to improve communication, teamwork, and common understandings across agencies. They also suggest a review issue of access to and use of appropriate assessment instruments as well as related training and professional development issues is conducted. NSSBA state there is a need for professional development on identification and assessment of students who are gifted, and 'other professionals' believe assessments for giftedness need improvement. Parents state there is a need for improved professional development for principals and teachers on assessment policies and procedures. They also feel there is a need for pre-service education and more attention to student assessment in pre-service education. NSSBA, parents, and 'other professionals' agree there is inadequate access to professional assessment services within boards and community agencies; 'other professionals' also want better access to occupational therapists. Parents also state there is a need for improvement in the level of knowledge and understanding of teachers regarding ADD, LD, autism, etc., and more understanding of potential difficulties in labelling students. SSC agree that the ability of resource teachers to assess, analyse findings, and use information to inform programming decisions needs improvement. Both teachers and CSAP also state the need for improvement in the availability and appropriateness of instruments and the need for adequate time to

conduct, discuss, and follow up on assessment results. Teacher assistants also state that more professional development for teachers on the identification of student strengths and needs is required.

SSC believe that recommendations by hospital staff and private practitioners are based on a medical model and sometimes refer to outdated materials. They demonstrate a lack of familiarity with the school setting, and this issue should be addressed.

Teacher assistants want to be involved in an improved team approach to communication and information sharing and regularly scheduled meetings between teachers and assistants. They feel that pertinent information, such as medical and behavioural information and student outcomes, is not always readily available, and rarely timely, especially during transitions, and even when it is confidential, it should be shared with them when it is important to their working with students. SSC suggest a protocol be put in place for reciprocal release of information. 'Other professionals' agree that transition information and inter-agency collaboration, particularly preschool to school, need improvement.

Teacher assistants also feel that practical information that they have on students' strengths and needs is not always valued. They would like to see better communication between schools and parents and acknowledge that communication is more difficult at the high school level. 'Other professionals' also want improved communication with parents. Parents and ANS agree with teacher assistants that communication needs improvement. They would like clarification on the nature of assessment and identification, that is, how and when it is conducted. They also want strengthened communications link between with teachers, and want to be informed of policies and procedures regarding assessment, especially at the time of school entry, and want improved sharing of assessment information and results. Parents also state that the transfer of information at times of transition (e.g., grade-to-grade, school-to-school) and the sharing of information between agencies and schools need improvement. They see the need for an established process for communication during student transitions and suggest that information brochures and copies of policies should be made available for parents. They would also like to see education jargon eliminated in communication with them. ANS agree that terminology in assessment reports be changed and updated, and that communication with parents about the policy needs improvement. Parents also state that the involvement of resource teachers in assessments needs improvement. SSC agree that communication is in need of improvement, especially between the IWK, private practitioners, and school systems, and attention should be paid to the inconsistencies in the use and understanding of terminology (e.g., different interpretations of IPP). ANS want improved awareness and communication regarding the Special Education Policy.

Both administrators and teachers believe that the use of assessment information to help ensure programming continuity for children entering the school system needs improvement. Administrators and 'other professionals' also state that the capacity (lack of resources) to implement recommendations in assessment reports needs improvement. SSC state that assessment tools (e.g., use of authentic assessment) and lack of assessment instruments and access to expertise in certain areas such as multiple disabilities are in need of attention. ANS agree that the availability of assessment instruments needs improvement. Teacher assistants want more objectivity in the progress evaluation of students on IPPs. Teachers name the following areas of identification and assessment as also in need of improvement:

- teacher assistants being assigned teacher responsibilities
- assessment services for students with moderate needs
- access to assessment services for high school students (e.g., assessment for EAPD funding)
- access to specialized assessment services for disabilities such as autism and for gifted students
- the connection between assessment and learning outcomes for students

Teacher assistants state that there is a need for improved services and programs for gifted and learning-disabled students. They also believe that there are insufficient resource teachers and students are falling through the cracks and need more individual teaching time.

NSSBA want a clarification of assessment for giftedness, and see a need for improvement in

- identification of students with less severe and/or less visible difficulties needs
- the resources to respond to identified needs and assessment recommendations needs
- the issue of community agencies directing the resources of school boards through assessment recommendations

NSSBA would also like clarification of liability issues connected with identification and assessment of students with special needs, and more attention to special education in pre-service education for teachers.

NSSBA and CSAP want improved continuity, consistency, and equitable practices of assessment and support, and NSSBA suggest a framework for this should be established across government departments.

CSAP also state that improvement is needed in

- inter-agency support and special education expertise in French
- appropriate Francophone assessment instruments and resources
- trained Francophone personnel to properly administer and interpret instrument results
- realistic strategies and outcomes

- language and terminology in reports
- communication of assessment results and information for transition purposes
- availability of specialized resources and supports

Both NSSBA and ANS suggest increased funding for identification and assessment is required (details under Funding).

Parents want assessments conducted across multiple settings and in environments familiar to the child. They believe assessments should be multidisciplinary and collaborative in nature, and inter-agency and interdepartmental involvement in assessment is essential. They want acknowledgement of the importance of early identification of student needs and a means to ensure that there is follow-up on recommendations in assessment reports.

SSC state that access to early intervention programs needs improvement, and suggest Early Identification and Intervention Services (EIIS) should be used to strengthen pre-school support for children with special needs and to facilitate smoother transition into the school system. ANS also believe that students should be referred earlier for assessments, and state that identification and assessment of student disabilities need to occur before grade 3.

'Other professionals' state that the translation of the policy to into practice needs improvement. They believe that the identification of behaviour disorders and links to learning disorders and difficulties needs improvement. They also want to see follow-up and updating of assessments when necessary, and parent recourse when assessments not done. They believe that IPPs are being developed without appropriate assessments and want to see a focus on strengths, not just needs. They also want

- more school participation in early intervention
- early intervention fully funded
- additional assessment personnel
- resources and supports for parent advocacy
- information for parents on the assessment process
- case management models
- screening at school entry (e.g., hearing)
- establishment of criteria for entitlement to services
- mechanisms to ensure reassessments and updates are conducted
- clarification and communication of board policy and procedures to staff, parents, and other professionals
- increased outreach and assessments in natural environments
- partnering of school boards with other professionals in the community to improve assessments

ANS would like to see an increase in parental involvement in the assessment process.

SSC suggest leadership from school administrators in ensuring the implementation of policy and procedures in the identification and assessment process should be improved. ANS state that compensation and redress for students from minority cultures who are identified with special needs and supports for minority students or students with other disabilities such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are needed. They believe there is systemic racism in attitudes and policies.

Program Planning Process

School administrators, NSSBA, teachers, teacher assistants, CSAP, SSC, and 'other professionals' in the focus groups agreed that adequate time for program planning and sharing information would result in improved adaptations. Administrators suggest that time for program planning should be scheduled into the regular school day, and meeting days where substitute teachers are provided should be allocated. SCC also want program planning scheduled into the school day and want adequate staffing (minimum of 50 percent FTE) for resource teacher allocation. CSAP suggest that a number of days scheduled early in the year should be allocated to IPP planning, and floating substitute teachers could be used to free teachers. They would also like to see teachers given the time for sharing their expertise and information. Time could be built into schedules and early dismissals, access to a bank of days, and the use of substitute teachers could help overcome this problem. NSSBA add that adequate time should be allowed for evaluation of plans.

Most groups agree that there is a need for more expertise and specialists at planning meetings, and that professional development for administrators, teachers, and teachers' assistants needs improvement. NSSBA want more availability of trained staff for planning programs and believe that the focus should be on professional development for classroom teachers, and that getting qualified special education, resource teachers, and guidance counsellors should be a priority. ANS suggest that professional development is needed for teachers to clarify the difference between adaptations and IPPs. SSC agree that professional development for teachers and resource teachers, particularly in writing measurable outcomes, needs improvement.

CSAP add that opportunities should be provided for parents to participate actively in professional development initiatives. They state that there is a need for all teachers to have special education component as part of pre-service training, and that professional development on behavioural issues is needed. SSC also state that new teachers are not comfortable or familiar with program planning for students with special needs and pre-service training, and that continuing education being provided by university faculties of education needs improvement. They suggest regional boards initiate dialogues with university faculties of education, and partnerships with these faculties be developed, or existing partnerships improved, to ensure clear understanding regarding program planning policies. University faculty could be involved in, and perhaps should be expected to attend,

professional development initiatives offered by the Department of Education. Certification for upgrading teachers (licence) should include a strong connection between coursework and classroom practice. Administrators also see the need for improved program planning competency in pre-service education of new teachers. SSC also want established provincial guidelines for training and qualification for teacher assistants, particularly in the area of providing personal/physical care. Time lines should be developed (e.g., five years) for upgrading, summer courses and workshops should be offered, and certification should be available.

'Other professionals' state that professional development in writing measurable outcomes for teachers should be provided. Teachers want increased professional development to help them better understand concepts and terminology (e.g., adaptations, IPPs, modifications), while CSAP and 'other professionals' believe there is a need for clarification of terminology for everyone involved. CSAP suggest that access to professional reviews, journals, and articles should be provided, and teachers should be given the opportunity to identify their professional needs. Teachers feel that teacher input into determining professional development needs for school board personnel and administrators, especially on specific disabilities, could result in better support for teachers in the program planning process. Administrators suggest that the Department of Education should provide summer institutes, meetings, and training workshops.

Teachers and CSAP believe that the writing of IPPs, planning from outcomes, and the transition component of IPPs, especially in year-to-year transitions, and follow-up need improvement. 'Other professionals also state that improvement is needed in transition planning. NSSBA state that changes/turnover in staff can lead to difficulties in transitions (e.g., term teachers.) Students state that transition meetings should be held in the spring to plan for the coming year. Teacher assistants want improved transitions of students into the school system, with regard to planning, and allocation of supports.

Administrators want improved school facilities in order to enhance environmental strategies for students with special needs (e.g., autism) and availability of a variety of programming options within an inclusionary model. Students also want more course options, including English, creative arts, and computer technology, particularly in rural schools and at the junior high level. Teacher assistants state access to a continuum of programs and services and access to assistive technology need improvement. Teacher assistants also feel that students with moderate needs are sometimes overlooked.

Both administrators and 'other professionals' want appropriate use of teacher assistant supports and more clarity about the role of teacher assistants in program planning. CSAP state that the hiring of unqualified

resource teachers is not acceptable, and NSSBA want the issue of qualifications of specialist teachers addressed and additional certification requirements for specialist teachers. SSC want competencies in hiring practices adhered to and want the practice of fragmenting resource positions to "top off" teacher assignment schedules, especially at senior high schools, stopped. They suggest an agreement between NSTU and the Department of Education regarding competencies required for specialist positions (e.g., resource) be sought.

Leadership is an issue that a number of groups state needs improvement. Teachers state that the lack of high school administrative support should be addressed, parents state that principal leadership and accountability at the school level needs improvement, and NSSBA believe the leadership provided by school administrators is not always as strong as it should be and state that boards must articulate the need for flexibility in assigning staff to ensure students needs are met.

Teachers state that IPPs should be a team effort, not solely the responsibility of resource teachers. 'Other professionals' state that more qualified personnel, such as teachers, principals, and student services administrators, should be involved in developing and implementing program planning. Teachers believe that in order to improve writing and implementing IPPs the role of team members should be clarified. Teacher assistants agree with 'other professionals' that their role needs clarification. Parents want their roles as members of the program planning team clarified. ANS want clarification about the roles of teacher assistants and student support workers. Students feel that program planning meetings should be attended by all of the student's teachers. Administrators want to see appropriate inter-agency services (e.g., nurses, OT, PT, social services) provided in schools and want a clarification of the roles of educational, health, and social services. CSAP see the need for more clarification of the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in the planning process. Teacher assistants believe they should be included in program planning meetings. NSSBA want expanded development of inter-agency partnerships. Parents want promotion of collaboration with other agencies as part of team approach and want it ensured that professional expertise is part of the program planning team. SSC recommend a review of staffing of schools in the allocation of support professionals (e.g., SLPs, others in terms of involvement/participation in program planning,) and suggest that high schools may need to assign case managers, especially in larger schools.

ANS suggest that more extensive communication regarding the policy and procedures is required. Parents also have concerns about the communication of student and programming information, especially at transition times, and want improved communication between teacher and teacher assistant. They also want improved reporting about student progress to parents. Teachers want more clarification regarding communication between teacher assistants and parents. Teacher assistants

also believe there is a lack of communication between teachers and assistants. They feel that outcomes for students and IPPs are not always shared with them or made clear to them, and they want teachers to schedule time to meet with them to share information and give more direction. They also feel that information they share with teachers is not always valued. Teacher assistants also feel that

- communication between classroom teachers and professional support staff needs to be improved, especially with regard to the integration of student outcomes and sharing student information
- the stability of teacher assistant support should be ensured year by year
- teacher assistant support services should be increased

Teacher assistants also want demonstrated recognition of the value of their services.

Teachers believe the process of teaming and program planning should be consistent across schools and levels. Parents want consistency in implementing program plans, especially school to school and board to board, and want this ensured at the school level. Teacher assistants believe criteria should be established for consistency of program planning and implementation across a regional school board. 'Other professionals' also want more consistency in developing outcomes and implementing IPPs; and CSAP want more consistency across schools. ANS state that more consistency in program planning team meetings is needed, and more consistency in support of students from year-to-year. NSSBA want guidance services consistently available at the elementary level. 'Other professionals' suggest that there is a need for consistent, qualified, and experienced resource teachers.

'Other professionals' also want

- paperwork streamlined and simplified
- use of classroom teachers to replace resource teachers on part-time tutorial basis
- improved attitudes towards IPPs, which may cause stigma for students, especially at high school
- better case management and co-ordination planning
- better early identification
- a change in school culture

Parents suggest that successful program planning teams could be used as models. SSC also state that the implementation of IPPs needs improvement and suggest that the visiting of schools where program planning is being successfully done be encouraged. ANS also want it ensured that policies and practices are culturally sensitive and inclusive and would like models such as those in First Nations Band schools put in place.

Teachers believe that the monitoring, adaptations, responsibility for high school credits, and appropriate inclusion of students need improvement. Teachers, parents, and 'other professionals' want an IPP template to document student information. Teachers and parents state that an evaluation of IPP outcomes and progress would improve services and accountability for outcomes. ANS and SSC also see a need to document, evaluate, and monitor plans and achievement of outcomes to ensure more accountability in the planning process. Students state that there should be ongoing review of what a student with special needs can do with a gradual increase in expectations.

NSSBA state that the following need improvement in order to improve program planning:

- funding (see details under Funding)
- clearly defined meaning of inclusion from the department
- clarity regarding when an IPP is and is not appropriate

School administrators believe that inclusionary practices should occur at the time of school entry, and better utilization of space for meeting specific needs is required.

CSAP and parents see a need for steps that will ensure that individual student's needs are considered when deciding on the level of inclusion, and more consideration in the program planning process of the best interest of the student. Students welcome more opportunities to participate in 'exploratories' to help them identify their interests and strengths and want opportunities for some self-assessment and course development and selection. 'Other professionals' also want student involvement in planning their own IPPs at junior and senior high levels.

Students want more annual and long-term learning outcomes explained to them and want specific and immediate feedback from teachers on tests and assignments, and more student/teacher conferencing that would help them improve and progress. They believe there should be more discussion with them regarding outcomes and expectations, and how and where support services will be provided to them. They want more emphasis on study skills and activities, the use of practical examples when a topic is introduced, and less notetaking. They suggest that an increase in peer helper programs and support staff would benefit them and continued additional support for students with severe learning disabilities. Special education materials need to be more challenging and interesting. Students also want follow-up and implementation of program plans.

Teachers and CSAP also state that some classroom teachers are not 'buying in' to the program planning process, especially in high schools, and this results in a lack of ownership. Students feel that the quality of the relationship between teachers and students needs improvement, as some teachers do not or are not able to teach student needs nor do they

understand the volume of work students can handle. They feel that teachers need to be sensitive to issues for students with special needs in semestered schools and would benefit from increased professional development in the area of disabilities. This could help students feel more comfortable asking teachers for help.

Students also want more emphasis on programming. ANS believe that if learning centres were more open to all students it would reduce the stigma associated with them for students with special needs.

Parents want to see improved connection between assessment and programming and better use of assessment information in the program planning process. They also want implementation of program plans and for resources (human and material) to support implementation, as they believe increasing demands on teachers hinder implementation.

To do this, they suggest

- timely development and updating of program plans
- development of programming for specific types of needs (e.g., behaviour, learning disabilities, autism, ADD)
- the IPP viewed as a dynamic working document
- implementation of programming developed by specialists
- improved process for evaluating student progress
- assurance that ongoing review is part of the program planning process
- adaptations not viewed as "watering down" curriculum
- schools should ensure that parents understand that they can bring parent advocates to program planning meetings and they will be welcome
- funding for resources to ensure implementation
- reduced class size

ANS state that improvements are needed in

- the program needs of very bright students who are often overlooked
- the type of support provided through learning centres
- flexibility in high school structure
- proper assessments as the basis for providing resource support to students

Parental Involvement

Teachers and CASP believe inclusion is a co-operative venture and when parents are involved, they are helpful. For this reason, more meaningful parental involvement should be encouraged, especially at the program planning stage. Teachers also state there is also a need for better communication with parents about assessment results and information. To facilitate this, the use of jargon should be reduced, the language in the reports should be more readable, and parents should be invited to take part in professional development workshops.

'Other professionals' state that parent involvement is a part of the process and enhances it. They believe that parental involvement at the identification, assessment, and planning levels is working well; however, they feel that there is a need for assistance for parents who are not comfortable, especially in the program planning process. They suggest that the initial contact with parent should be positive and that a means for ensuring that parents are engaged in the planning process should be established. They want parents made more welcome, more parental input, and more valuing of their input, and increased awareness and information for parents regarding the program planning process. Some teacher assistants state that parent involvement is working well, but most agree that parent involvement needs improvement. Parents believe more attempts should be made to help them feel they are part of the team. Some parents feel intimidated and overwhelmed by jargon.

Students want improved communication between teachers and parents and suggest that teachers contact parents in a variety of ways, including telephone and emails; and that teachers should not only contact parents when things aren't going well. NSSBA, teacher assistants, and parents themselves believe there should be more honesty with parents on the part of all involved regarding the severity of abilities and disabilities and the students' needs. NSSBA also believe there is need for improved communication with parents in order for parents of students with special needs and parents of other students to understand assessment issues. ANS also want improved clarity in reporting student progress to parents and informing parents regarding the need for individualized program planning and the implications of placing a student on an IPP. Parents would like less delay in informing parents of possible learning difficulties.

ANS want more parent education about outcomes-based programming, and about parental rights to ensure that all stakeholders are included and participate meaningfully in the program planning team. Parents also suggest their participation would improve if parent information sessions on various types of special needs were provided.

Parents also want

- leadership provided by school administrators in the program planning process
- more onus on team members other than parents to initiate the assessment process
- specific and measurable outcomes
- improved level of implementation at high school
- suggestions about ways they can support their children at home
- less lag time in updating IPPs
- improved dissemination of information on policies and procedures of the Department of Education and regional boards to parents
- improved resources, supports, and physical accessibility

- improved communication
- their input valued

Parents suggest

- allocation of supports for implementation of program plans
- articulation on how the student will be evaluated
- manner in which student progress is reported

Resources and Supports

School administrators, teachers, CSAP, and 'other professionals' agree that there are insufficient resources and materials for classroom teachers. Teachers say they particularly need textbooks with a variety of levels for instruction, materials that make connections across subject areas, and age-appropriate resources and materials for senior high students. They also state that improvements to APSEA are cited as needed. Teachers state that access to APSEA is cumbersome and more itinerant support for APSEA is needed.

SSC and parents agree that availability and use of age-appropriate materials needs improvement. 'Other professionals' and students both state that assessment tools are 'out of date'. The students complain that there is a lack of resources for their projects and no science text book is available. They feel that students with special needs should be allowed to use the same science equipment as other students, and they want more challenging scientific experiments. They also want math tests specifically for gifted students. Teachers agree that more resources for gifted children are needed. CSAP agree that materials need to be more age appropriate. NSSBA want more support and resources for IPP students in smaller schools. Teachers also complain that for students on IPPs there is not enough choice of ALR. They suggest that books in alternative formats could be made available through the book bureau and would like to see set curriculum guidelines and resources. Better information about available resources and on professional resources on current best practices should be available and suggest that a resource bank or central place of materials could be established to reduce the necessity of 'reinventing the wheel'. Students want more special programs such as "putting on the brakes" to help students cope with behavioural challenges. NSSBA want more choices for parents such as residential schools. Teachers and CSAP both want improved assistive technology such as sound field systems and intellakeys, implementation of Reading Recovery™ in French; and access to specialized services such as APSEA in French. NSSBA agree there is a need for access to services for Francophone students who are visually and hearing impaired and for more equitable professional human resources/ qualified personnel across all regions. They want more current information about, and more hardware, for children with hearing impairments. Administrators see a need for improvement in services for students with learning disabilities at the secondary level. 'Other professionals' state that access to resources should not be tied to IPP funding, and there is a need for improvement in courses in industrial arts and access to SLD

programming for African Nova Scotia students. CSAP want more communication with teachers regarding available resources and a strategy for teachers to share the successful units of work they have planned. SCC want a more equitable distribution of resources within regions. ANS want improved resources for students with moderate needs. They agree with teachers that a continuum of programming and service options and more funding to provide school-level resources are needed. Parents state that availability of and funding for materials, equipment, and assistive technololgy appropriate to student needs, particularly at the secondary level, and equipment to support life skills instruction are inadequate. Resources to support students who are gifted are also inadequate. They want increased availability of information for parents (e.g., school system and community resources, Department of Education policies and guidelines, brochures on specific disabilities). They also want increased funding for purchase of appropriate materials and to expand the special education component of pre-service teacher training.

Teacher assistants also want improved resources and materials, including

- a variety of materials available through the Book Bureau to meet special needs
- more appropriate resources to meet students' needs
- access to specialist services for students (e.g., SLP, OT, PT.)
- more efficient use of resources
- designated concentrated resources in certain schools

'Other professionals' believe there should be a formula for allocating support services. They want enrichment resources and access to information for parents to help children with instructional difficulties and homework, and they suggest an after-school hours storefront model. They also suggest guides for special education teachers and for parents on the IPP process.
Both teacher assistants and students state that more computer and assistive technology access for students with special needs is required. One student complained that his/her 'phonic ear' does not work well.

SCC want issues associated with resource services (availability, expertise, delivery models) addressed and state there is a need for "dedicated" services for students with special needs. They want expanded use of technology and "in-class" materials and human resources for supporting students with special needs. They suggest that implementation of the policy should continue, with acknowledgement and addressing of the issue of resources and supports (but this shouldn't stop implementation). They want to see a maximizing of the potential support that can be provided by the use of assistive technology and improved access to services for French language students (e.g., SLPs, SLD teachers.)

NSSBA want improved ability to provide home school support (e.g., respite care) and want more honesty with the public about what can and cannot be done. ANS want a long-term commitment of resources to implement inclusive schooling.

Teachers also complain there is insufficient funding for equipment such as disposable gloves and inadequate physical accessibility, particularly specialized spaces such as washrooms for adaptive equipment. 'Other professionals' agree that physical space and accessibility need improvement. Both students and teacher assistants state the need for space to work with students one-to-one.

CSAP also want more professional development on teaching life skills at the high school level; training on a variety of program options such as multi-age classrooms and learning centres; and program courses for teachers on the special education policy and inclusion. 'Other professionals' want pre-service training for teachers; more training and professional development for teachers on general knowledge and awareness regarding students with special needs; and more professional development for teacher assistants. Teachers and CSAP want improved professional development on learning disabilities, high medical needs, and behavioural problems and on the management of teacher assistants. CSAP want existing human resources to be used for professional development. Teacher assistants agree that they need more inservice training opportunities, including expertise in specific medical conditions and procedures, and training in assessment for levels of assistive technology. They suggest that inservice training for teacher assistants should be co-ordinated to ensure consistency in supporting specific student needs, such as sign language skills, autism, ESL training, and crisis intervention; and CPR/first aid training should be mandatory for teacher assistants. They also want more professional development for teachers on how to implement IPPs and more funding and time for professional development. They suggest that the school day be extended in order to make time for a half-day inservice every month. Inservices could be conducted by the IWK, VON, etc., and locations should be alternated. They would like the opportunity to attend the same sessions as teachers and would like to participate in summer institutes to train for specific needs, such as Braille. They feel that they should be paid to attend inservices, and they should be funded to attend summer institutes. They also feel they should not lose pay for storm days. Students believe teachers should receive more training and professional development to improve their knowledge about computers and other assistive technology. 'Other professionals' also believe that there is a need for more professional development workshops on writing effective IPPs. SSC want more professional development in program planning, classroom organization, classroom management, sensitivity, and awareness. They believe there are gaps in professional development and training in areas such as autism. SCC state that new teachers are not comfortable or familiar with program planning for students with special needs, and pre-service training and continuing education should be provided by university faculties of education. Parents also state that there should be more emphasis on programming for students with special needs in pre-service teacher training, and improved professional development for classroom teachers. They want appropriate and specific professional development for all staff (teachers, administrators, teacher assistants, lunch monitors) and training programs for volunteers.

'Other professionals' also believe skilled teachers are being 'burnt out' because of the lack of qualified personnel and insufficient time and resources. 'Other professionals' state that territoriality among professionals is a problem and that the decentralization of specialist staff leads to isolation and lack of access to human and material resources.

SSC and parents state that more planning is needed.

'Other professionals' also want to see more professional staff, more specialists such as social workers, psychologists, occupational therapists, and career services, and more youth support workers. They believe there should be defined standards for professional staff and a formula for designated specialist services. They would also like mentorship for new teachers. Teachers and CSAP want more resource teachers with expertise in special education to be hired and believe it is important that co-ordinators and program directors have special education expertise. CSAP want access to Francophone qualified specialists, such as speech language pathologists, psychologists, and occupational therapists. CSAP state there is a need for itinerant support. SSC want improved availability of resource teachers who are well qualified, flexible, and innovative and increased supports and expanded teacher networks. They believe an itinerant model for providing expertise in specific areas, such as autism, should be established. ANS want the availability of external specialist services (such as OT), resources to support gifted students, and availability of professional support staff improved. They suggest that more qualified professional support staff (i.e., resource, reading specialist, and special education teachers) be available on site. Parents state that human resources are inadequate. They are concerned about the availability of staff to support implementation and the disruption caused by changes in staff. They state that numbers of qualified professional staff with expertise in the area of special needs (e.g., resource teachers, SLPs, guidance, psychologists) should be increased. They note that there is a shortage of qualified specialists available for hiring in some parts of the province and suggest the salary of sign language interpreters be increased in order to retain them in Nova Scotia. They believe there is an over-reliance on peer support for students who have special needs, and improvements should be made in accessing and using volunteers more effectively. Students should have improved access to professional support at the high school level, access to physiotherapy and nursing care; and both students and parents state there should be improved collaboration with professionals and community agencies. CSAP and teachers state that class sizes should be reduced. Teachers recommend a learning centre ratio of 1:1, 1:5, or 1:6. NSSBA are concerned about taking away resource teachers to create Reading Recovery™ programs and want more funding provided to support Reading Recovery™. Teachers are also concerned about the practice of taking ½ FTE from resource for Reading Recovery™, and suggest that funding be designated for Reading Recovery™ and more interagency support be put in place. Teachers are also concerned about the practice of using unqualified teachers for resource and state that adaptable classroom teachers and appropriate attitudes are needed.

School administrators, teachers, SSC, CSAP, and 'other professionals' are also concerned about the appropriate utilization of teacher assistant resources to support student with high needs, and they want an increase in professional staff who can provide support. Teachers and CSAP also want an increase in direct service and resource teaching and increased access to expertise, particularly to speech language pathologists, psychologists, and professional staff such as learning disability and autism specialists. NSSBA state that the availability of specialists needs improvement. 'Other professionals' agree that there is a need for increased professionals for assessment, counselling, and programming. Teachers and CSAP complain that there are insufficient supports for EBD students. 'Other professionals' agree with teachers and CSAP that unqualified teachers are hired, and the number of teacher assistants and the training of teacher assistants is inadequate. 'Other professionals' want better role differentiation between teachers and teacher assistants. NSSBA want qualifications for teacher assistants and suggest that community college programs for teacher assistants should be provided. NSSBA and parents want clarification of the role of resource teachers versus teacher assistants and want the Department of Education to establish clear criteria for teacher assistants with regard to cognitive and physical needs and behaviour. ANS want teacher assistant services to be more focussed on students. Parents state that teacher assistance services (e.g., allocation, lack of male teacher assistants for personal care needs, contract issues, supervision, and direction provided by teachers) should be improved.

Teacher assistants want more clarification of their roles and responsibilities. They believe teacher assistants should be involved in transition planning at year-end, and there should be more communication between the principals and teacher assistants. Teacher assistants also want the frequency of changes in assignment of teacher assistants reduced to provide more consistency for students. However, they also state that long-term assignments of teacher assistants promote dependence. They would like a co-ordinator available for teacher assistant consultation and would like the opportunity to meet with each other to discuss student needs. They suggest that links and networks across the province be provided for teacher assistants.

NSSBA believe the class size and class size formula need improvement and suggest that average class size should be calculated on basis of classroom teachers only and a scale for IPP (1:5 teachers) should be determined. Teachers and CSAP state that the increase in class size and ratio of staff to student needs is inadequate and interferes with meeting the needs of students, especially those with moderate needs. They strongly recommend increased and protected funding for special education, a reduction in class size, and that the staffing formula be reconsidered. CSAP want better ratios of staff to student needs.

Teachers and CSAP believe there is a need for access to appropriate medical documents for better understanding of student challenges.

NSSBA want better interdepartmental co-operation between the Departments of Health, Education, Justice, and Community Services. SSC see the need for more effective leadership for policy implementation at the board and school levels.

Students would also like more access to technology for students going on to university and community colleges. Students also want more access to extra help from teachers and resource teachers and more one-to-one access to teacher assistants, especially at the elementary level. They believe that the treatment of students needs improvement. Some students with special needs are set off in a corner of the school, others have to deal with derogatory terms. They suggest there is a need for

- sensitivity to students' feelings (e.g., tone of voice, teasing by other students)
- all students to understand each other
- encouragement for students to seek help
- encouragement to be independent
- more options for student evaluations
- playground supervision to stop the fighting
- the use of white boards for students allergic to chalk
- more support for ESL students
- more teacher knowledge of accommodations
- more opportunities to work in mixed ability-level groups
- more guidance for career options for students with special needs
- more information for students about the special education policy
- better supports for students with special needs
- support for sports teams
- more diversity of learning experiences, such as field trips
- life skills programming

Students would like a commitment from government to increase funding for human, technological, and material resources and supports.

Students want improved communication with teachers and would like to see teachers demonstrate respect and sensitivity towards students with special needs. They are concerned that some teachers are missing important information as they do not check student files and suggest that teachers check student files at the beginning of the school year. They are also concerned that some teachers don't always recognize students' needs and complain that teachers think students are not paying attention or are doing something deliberately when in fact it is their disability. They also want teachers to repeat an explanation rather than expressing it differently.

Students say that some teachers are not making all of the adaptations for students who need them and do not acknowledge that there are alternative ways to writing for students to show what they know. Some teachers need to have more strategies for working with different learning styles, do not always seem to seek or listen to student feedback, and do not discuss students'

strengths with them. Students also want more consistency of testing procedures at the classroom level and want more support for students in their transitions from school to school. They suggest that teachers review tests and discuss with students what was incorrect and why, and then listen to students' explanations of why and how he/she answered in a certain way.

Students acknowledge that large class sizes make it difficult for teachers to know students' strengths and needs and suggest that lower class sizes and more staff are needed for dealing with student needs, a 1:1 ratio, and that some teachers would benefit from professional development on various disabilities and ways of identifying students' strengths and needs. Peer tutors could also help address some of these needs. Students also want better access to technology to address identified student needs. They also want more information about their own individual strengths and needs so they can advocate for themselves and want to be taught what their learning styles are. They suggest that teachers can get to know students better through extracurricular activities. They would also like students integrated into classes that include students with all levels of ability.

SSC state that experiential, resource-based learning for all students is essential, and resource delivery models such as co-teaching are needed. They see a need for the gaps in pre-service education regarding inclusion, program planning, and implementation to be addressed by

- improved emphasis on classroom organization and classroom management in today's classrooms where students now have a wide range of needs
- increased ability of classroom teachers for dealing more effectively with realities of today's classrooms

Administrators want to see individualized programming at the high school level. They also believe that increased allocation of financial resources and supports and an increase in the range of programming options for students on IPPs at the high school level are required.

A number of groups want more consistency. Teachers say there is a lack of consistency across regional boards in access to programs and services. Teacher assistants want more equitable availability of resources and want more consistency among teachers. CSAP want more consistent practices across all regions in resources and materials, transition planning and documentation, and evaluation of IPP outcomes.

Teachers and CSAP state there are poor programming options and transitions for 18–21 (outside P–12) and want an increased and equitable continuum of programming services and options, especially community-based services for the 18–21 group (18-credit process). NSSBA want more choices at transitional stages for junior and senior high students and the 18–21 year age group. They are also concerned about the lack of options for children after they leave school; the three- to four-year waiting period for workshops and day programming; and that the Department of Community Services is cutting day programs. They recommend improved access to community vocational/training for students moving to the community from public school, particularly after 21 years of age.

Funding

NSSBA state that special education grants to boards are far less than expenditures for minimal offerings and that the percentage of the provincial budget allocated is inadequate to meet expectations and to deal with recommendations from pediatricians, psychologists, and other agencies regarding services to meet children's needs. Boards are taking funds from discretionary areas to meet demands. They feel they are projecting the image that they are looking after the need but can't do it. For example, one board has only three staff for a population of 17,000 students. They want an increase in the general formula funding and increased funding to improve access to SLD programming and services. NSSBA believes that lack of funding impedes change and want funding to boards increased, targeted funding for specialists, and a funding formula developed for small rural senior high schools. They are concerned that school advisory councils act are expected to act as business managers, and want boards to learn to say 'no' to the province. NSSBA and ANS both want more clarity regarding the funding formula for special education grants.

NSSBA also want

- more funding for assistive technology and building adaptations (The current level of funding is inadequate to meet costs of legislation requirements, e.g., for elevators.)
- improved interagency involvement. (Currently departments such as Community Services and Justice can 'pay now or pay later'.)
- a lobby for special education funding, e.g., as done by the Department of Health
- collaboration between the Departments of Education and Community Services to identify more funding options
- more central direction provided directly to schools from the Department of Education (consensus needed for this)
- improved two-way communication with the Department of Health regarding service recommendations by pediatricians and psychologists and costs of providing such
- more funding, services, and time from other departments to assist cross-department areas
- an examination of records of costs associated with residential schools to determine where funds have been directed
- honest and realistic expectations related to funding for services
- ensurance that funds go to those providing the services, and there is no 'double-dipping' across government departments
- ensurance that funding is in place to support any new legislation
- an investigation of possibilities for federal funding and a concentration on regaining federal funding that previously supported Youth Training Centres ($5m budget, federal government covered half the cost)

Teachers in the focus groups agreed that funding is a major issue. Teachers and CSAP state that global and special education grants and funding are inadequate, particularly funding for SLP, ESL, TAs, professional support such as consultants and psychologists, SLD, assistive technology,

PDD/autism, and professional development. Both groups believe that funding based on enrolment disadvantages small and rural schools. They suggest that cuts to education funding be stopped, funding for special education should be protected, and funding must be allocated to ensure effective use of resources. Program-based funding, based on costs and needs, should be implemented to equalize the haves and have-nots, and more money should be spent on materials, including for gifted students, and for professional development. Teachers also believe that pressure groups skew funding; the issue of transportation costs in rural areas should be addressed; and teachers should be consulted before funding decisions are made.

CSAP want the way in which special education funding is determined to be reconsidered. They want designated funding at the school level for students with special needs and state that there is a need for operational structures whereby the school board is accountable for special education funding. They suggest that the results of the St. Frances Xavier University study on funding, as it relates to pre- and post-policy implementation, be investigated.

Administrators want principals to be given the decision-making authority to identify staffing requirements based on school and community needs; for example, the flexibility to hire a resource teacher in place of two teacher assistants and to hire professional staff in order to reduce class sizes.

'Other professionals' also recommend increased flexibility in funding to allow for moving resources to meet student needs and portability of funding to follow children moving from one school to another. They want the global grant and the level of funding for APSEA increased and an increase in special education funding that is designated and protected. They believe that more funding is essential for adequate resources for implementation of the policy. In particular, they want adequate funding for

- professional development for professional support staff (e.g., resource, psychologists, guidance)
- development of materials for students with special needs
- severe learning disabilities
- early intervention (0–6 years)
- services for 16–19-year-old population
- supporting community partnerships and integrated services in schools
- parenting programs
- more local accountability for funding provided to schools
- funding mechanisms that recognize differences in urban and rural schools
- funding stability through a multi-year plan
- principals' knowledge of how funding works improved
- funding based on needs rather than based on lobbying
- clarity in how special education is funded to ensure consistency, transparency, and accountability to parents
- clarity across government departments for responsibility for funding different needs (e.g., medical, mental health.)

'Other professionals' also want other government departments (e.g., Health, Community Services) to fund clinical services, housing for homeless youth, substance abuse programs, OT services, etc.

ANS believe that provincial funding to appropriately support implementation of policy should be provided and want the additional needs of inner-city schools taken into account in the funding process. They state that the distribution of funding needs to be more equitable, communication about how education funding is allocated must be improved, and funding should be provided to educate the public about the special education policy. They want the level of funding for all types of resources and supports increased; funding for student support workers, and funding for their professional development included in special education grant to boards.

SSC state there is a need for a long-term plan to address the inadequacy of special education funding, and a stronger connection made between the special education funding and the services and programs provided. A tracking system should be established to show how special education funding is used. This will enable boards to demonstrate accountability while at the same time assisting them in pointing out funding gaps/inadequacies. They want the Funding Education Committee expanded to include all board-level program directors and ways of increasing the understanding of Funding Education Committee regarding special education needs and funding issues identified. They state that improvements are needed in

- recognition of costs related to providing assistive technology, to improve physical accessibility, and to fulfil special transportation requirements
- understanding that the special education grant is meant to assist with the cost of special education and is not meant to be a special education budget, as students with special needs are counted for calculation of general formula funding too
- recognition in funding of the impact of geography, school sizes, declining enrolments

Parents believe that some additional services are being provided with current funding. They want more funding for public education and want a clarification that lack of funding applies to the entire education system and is not due solely to the costs of special education funding. They state there is a need for a funding level to appropriately support the implementation of the policy, and this includes increased funding for specialist positions such school psychologists.

NSSBA would like to see increasde funding for additional professionals to carry out and co-ordinate assessments and assessment services

- to improve access across the province
- for school boards
- in the Departments of Health and Community Services
- for co-ordination at department levels

They also believe more funding is required to ensure availability of human and material resources necessary for the implementation of program plans and for direct funding for specialist teachers.

Inclusive Schools

"No one wants to go back. Inclusion is better." [Teachers' focus group]

Administrators, teachers, teacher assistants, CSAP, parents, and 'other professionals' in the focus groups all agree that a more consistent understanding and application of inclusive schooling is needed. Often current attitudes are based on misconceptions, and there is a need for change in perceptions regarding mainstreaming. Parents believe there is some misunderstanding and misconceptions about inclusive schooling and the meaning of inclusion. They suggest that specific education and training on what inclusion means and what it involves should be provided for teachers and parents, and more information should be available for the general public. ANS would like clarification of the meaning of inclusion for teachers and parents and suggest a shared understanding and appreciation of inclusive schooling be promoted.

Administrators, teachers, teacher assistants, CSAP, and 'other professionals' also agree that cuts in resources undermine inclusion and want a reinstatement of previous support and expertise. NSSBA also wants more consistency and believes the Department of Education should set minimum standards and a base level of services, and there should be a balance of flexibility and consistency to meet individual student's needs. Both teachers and CSAP suggest that, for effective implementation of the policy, there is a need for improved planning at the board and department level and for more appropriate and efficient use of teacher assistants, more time to meet the students' needs, more human resources and instructional materials, and smaller classes. NSSBA states an appropriate time frame to implement changes should be established, and more options and flexibility (e.g., pilot learning centres) should be provided. 'Other professionals' agree that the collaboration of government departments is needed and the interpretation of the policy at the board level needs improvement. They want stability and consistency in board-level administration and policy. They also agree that class size should be reduced, and better access to materials, professional development, and professional expertise is required.

CSAP want assurance that program development and curriculum guides should provide examples of moderate adaptations and reflect the diverse needs of students rather than for the 20–23 percent of students who go to university. Administrators believe the progress of each student should be evaluated in each process. 'Other professionals' state that there is a need for a means to ensure that transition planning takes place.

To effectively practise inclusion, teachers say they need more support from school administrators, and CSAP believes there is a need for expertise at the board level for school administrators. Teacher assistants suggest that

inclusion will be more successful when all partners take ownership. 'Other professionals' believe that parents need to be more involved and recommend the establishment of a support program for parents. Administrators, teachers, teacher assistants, 'other professionals', and CSAP see the need for a wide range/continuum of programming for students with special needs. Teachers and CSAP recommend more programming options be available at the junior and senior high school levels, including multi-age classrooms and learning centres; more comprehensive, as well as academic, programming; and more flexibility in high school credits. They want more support for learning-disabled students and those with invisible disabilities and suggest that itinerant teachers could be used for students with special needs. 'Other professionals' agree with teachers and CSAP that behavioural challenges must be addressed. Teacher assistants also state that more funding and human resources are required to make inclusion successful. They believe that high school teachers tend to teach their subjects, not the students. 'Other professionals' state that the comfort and acceptance level of all students in the regular classroom needs improvement. They suggest that examples of successful inclusive school practices within boards should be used as models for other schools.

Administrators state that community schools may not have all the necessary resources to meet students' needs, and placement of students should not be restricted if better facilities and services exist in neighbourhood schools.

Administrators state that the social transition to senior high school is difficult for some students, and teachers say there is a need for improved post-grade 12 and vocational options. NSSBA think the provincial and federal governments should provide EI support to help students with special needs gain employment, and there is a need to partner with community colleges.

NSSBA, teacher assistants, and 'other professionals' state that there is a need for improved accessibility, for example, classroom size, specialized rooms (like Snoezelen) and bathrooms, and accessible grounds, in order for inclusion to be successful. They believe the level of support for children with higher needs was higher prior to the inclusion policy, and it needs to be raised, and that government has an obligation to provide funding at a level necessary to sustain children in the school system.

NSSBA believe there is a need for alternative schools, and they would like to see an ad hoc committee on inclusion established. Teacher assistants suggest a student centre where students can meet with their peers would be helpful. 'Other professionals' would like to see more use of peer mediation and peer support programs.

One area that particularly needs improvement, according to teachers and teacher assistants in the focus groups, is in the attitude of classroom

teachers. They state that current attitudes towards streaming are based on misunderstandings. Both teachers and CSAP are concerned that students are taken out of class for resource, and in some cases this is detrimental to the students' progress. Both groups also criticize teachers for teaching to the middle, and not adequately addressing moderate and average needs. And teachers want more recognition for the work they do.

Students state that not all school activities are as inclusive as they should, especially at the senior high level. More options in extracurricular activities, such as sports activities that are not competitive, are needed so there will be more opportunities for participation of students with special needs. Student councils need to me more inclusive in their membership and in their activities and practices.

Students feel that more emphasis on respect for others is needed in schools, and this must be reinforced through modeling by teachers. There is a tendency for students to form "cliques," a problem for students who are not part of the "in crowd." Some students do not accept those with special needs, and teasing and bullying are not always addressed. Stereotyping of students occurs, and special classes are sometimes located in isolated areas of the school. For these reasons, they want more acceptance of diversity.

Students believe that participation of students with special needs is impacted by lack of resources and class size and outlined what they believe will make inclusion more successful

- more opportunities for students with special needs to participate in school activities
- expanded peer helper and peer mediation programs
- support such as SLD provided to students in the regular classroom
- students with special needs placed in classes throughout the school and not just with the most accepting teachers
- students working at their own level in regular class
- more attention to pacing of work and teaching
- avoidance of "teaching to the lowest" academically
- confidentiality respected in the process of sharing information
- opportunities for students to show their strengths to their peers
- improvement in questioning techniques used in the classroom to provide more opportunities for students to show what they know and are able to do
- reduced class size
- education for students regarding special needs and diversity as part of PDR courses
- techniques such as "Circle of Friends" to help students socially
- challenges provided for students who are gifted
- options for addressing the difficulty of classrooms disrupted by students with behavioural problems

They suggest that fundraising projects should include consideration of how to make a school more inclusive, for example, the purchase of assistive technology equipment.

Students also want improved communication and collaboration. They believe more discussion with parents and teachers about strengths and needs, and more valuing of students opinions, will also help. They also want teachers to spend more time getting to know students' strengths and needs and talking with students about how to be successful and build their self-esteem. They state that guidance staff are usually helpful in the process of inclusion, and students would like guidance counsellors to be more involved in putting inclusive practices into place in the school. They would also like more access to guidance counsellors. Some teachers are making great efforts to make inclusivity work, but staff changes and transfers disrupt continuity, and students feel that more staff commitment is needed. They would like to see more modeling of acceptance and inclusivity practices by teachers.

Parents state that consistency in the leadership provided by school administrators needs improvement. Awareness and sensitivity from some teachers, and from students who do not have special needs and their parents, need improvement. They suggest children should be taught about diversity through all levels of public school, and understanding of inclusion should be promoted through communication strategies. They also want the use of labels dropped and the use "person-first" language practised.

Parents believe that to implement inclusion, there should be an increased access to professional staff with expertise regarding special needs; increased funding to support implementation of inclusion; and more should be done to capitalize on opportunities for including students (e.g., classroom learning activities, field trips, etc.). They believe the issue of meeting the diversity of needs in the classroom needs improvement, and students with less obvious special needs (e.g., learning disability, ADHD) should be better included. They also suggest

- establish support networks for teachers and training qualifications for teacher assistants
- provide inservice training for all staff involved with students who have special needs
- review delivery models for providing services
- provide appropriate transition planning for students moving from congregated programs to inclusive settings
- implement programs such as "Circle of Friends"
- make more appropriate use of resource/learning centres
- increase access to teacher assistant support
- hold boards accountable for implementing special education policy

ANS state there is inadequate funding to support inclusion and want ensured funding and professional development in place to support inclusion; teaching strategies to accommodate a wider variety of learning needs are required.

SSC state that the identification of how we need to differentiate implementing inclusive practices at various levels and the implementation of inclusive schooling at senior high need improvement.

They want a clarifying of the role of resource staff in inclusive schooling and a reduction in the level of teacher frustration and feelings of inadequacy. They suggest further research on best practices and their implementation to identify ways of improving co-ordination of support services. They believe that in order for inclusion to be successful

- a broader range of courses including service learning options at high school must be offered
- inclusive school practices must be addressed as part of pre-service teacher education
- students must be supported in developing self-advocacy skills
- high school implementation must be supported through increased professional development and funding

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